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Friday, 19 January 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Abdrakhmanov	(Kazakhstan)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Mituy Edjang
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kuwait	Mr. Al Sabah
	Netherlands	Mr. Haspels
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Mr. Czaputowicz
	Russian Federation	Mr. Lavrov
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Field
	United States of America	Mr. Sullivan

Agenda

Maintenance of international peace and security

Building regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model to link security and development

Letter dated 2 January 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2018/7)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Maintenance of international peace and security

Building regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model to link security and development

Letter dated 2 January 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2018/7)

The President: I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, Ministers and other distinguished representatives present in the Security Council Chamber. Their presence underscores the importance of the subject matter we will discuss today.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Belgium, Germany, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Her Excellency Ms. Joanne Adamson, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/7, which contains the text of a letter dated 2 January 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting the a concept note on the item under consideration.

The Council has before it the text of a statement by the President on behalf of the Council on the subject of today's meeting. I thank the Council members for their valuable contributions to the statement. In accordance with the understanding reached among the members of the Council, I shall take it that the members of the Security Council agree to the statement, which will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2018/2.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres.

The Secretary-General: I welcome this debate, convened by Kazakhstan, as a sign of enhanced cooperation among Member States in Central Asia and Afghanistan. I also welcome the Security Council's continued support for Afghanistan, as demonstrated by its recent mission to the country. The entire international community has a stake in peace, stability and development in Afghanistan, and the countries of Central Asia have a particularly important role to play.

Sustainable development is a fundamental end in itself, enabling people, communities and societies to flourish and fulfil their potential. But sustainable and inclusive development is also an important factor in preventing and ending conflict and in sustaining peace Only by addressing the root causes of crisis, including inequality, exclusion and discrimination, will we build peaceful societies resilient to terrorism and violent extremism.

The United Nations development system is engaged in supporting Governments throughout the region to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to invest in sustainable economic growth, including greater opportunities for young people, women and girls. Education, vocational training and jobs must be an absolute priority in national and regional development cooperation.

Central Asia has made significant progress on sustainable development in recent decades. In Tajikistan, for example, the poverty rate has been halved, from 81 per cent in 2003 to 31 per cent in 2015. But countries in the region can never achieve their full potential alone. All are landlocked, and many developed over decades as economically interdependent parts of a larger whole. Growth, increased employment opportunities and prosperity depend upon accelerated economic cooperation and integration. The common geography and history of Central Asian countries and Afghanistan and their strong cultural ties create enormous potential for mutually beneficial joint projects, trade and exchange.

Despite the centuries during which the Silk Road was one of the most important trading routes in the world, trade among Central Asian countries has fallen to low levels since they achieved independence nearly 30 years ago. Opportunities for intraregional trade are significant, and even modest improvements can

result in substantial gains for all the people of the region. I am heartened by recent signs of change for the better. During my visit to Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan last June, I was encouraged to see new bilateral and regional connections and better regional dynamics.

First, new efforts are taking place to better manage the water resources that are fundamental to economic development in that region. Those resources are coming under unprecedented strain. As I witnessed during my visit, almost 30 per cent of Tajikistan's spectacular glaciers have melted over the past 10 years alone. The Aral Sea serves as a terrible warning of the consequences of mismanagement. We must use those ecological disasters as examples to spur greater cooperation and action. Central Asian Governments have recently begun to intensify cooperation on water resources through bilateral water commissions and agreements. Those developments hold important lessons for Afghanistan, where water-dependent farming and agriculture make up nearly half the economy. The United Nations is promoting mediation and dialogue through the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia. The Centre is ready to help modernize the regional legal framework on managing transboundary water resources, and is including Afghanistan in its efforts to build capacity in water diplomacy. Finding joint approaches to managing shared water resources, including mechanisms to resolve disputes, builds confidence in bilateral and multilateral relationships. That can lead, in turn, to greater investment and prosperity for the benefit of all.

Secondly, I was encouraged to see positive developments in energy cooperation, which is fundamental to promoting development and security. Several cross-border initiatives are now being planned, or are under way, including the Central Asia-South Asia power project, a natural gas pipeline running from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan and India, and a new power transmission line running from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan. The United Nations family stands ready to support those initiatives and others that can bring greater investment and prosperity to the region.

Thirdly, increased trade is a prerequisite for growth, sustainable development and building resilience to external economic shocks. The personal contacts resulting from trade can also help dismantle informal barriers and increase trust. We should build upon civil society initiatives in that area to bring communities together across borders, including women's groups that mediate local tensions and develop joint infrastructure projects.

In that context, I would like to highlight Kazakhstan's ambitious programme for Afghan students. More than 500 students from Afghanistan graduated from Kazakh universities and technical schools in recent years, and nearly 500 others are in the process of completing their studies. Kazakhstan has committed $50 million to supporting that initiative. Uzbekistan is on the same track. Central Asian countries bordering Afghanistan are now improving cross-border infrastructure, while Uzbekistan launched direct flights between Tashkent and Kabul last year. Several railway and power-line projects are creating physical connections between Afghanistan and its northern neighbours, including the Lapis Lazuli railway, which connects Turkmenistan with Afghanistan. Such projects have enormous potential to spur economic transformation.

Security challenges continue to define much of the discussion surrounding Afghanistan and Central Asia. The Afghan Government's fight against violent extremism, terrorism and transnational organized crime has implications for the entire region and for the world. Responding to such threats cannot be the responsibility of the Afghan Government alone. Effective counter-terrorism depends upon regional and multilateral cooperation based firmly on human rights. The five countries of Central Asia have now completed the second phase of the joint plan of action for implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, adopted in 2011. I was honoured to host the high-level dialogue on the strategy during my visit last June.

The regional plan brings Central Asian countries together to share best practices and lessons learned, thereby reflecting the five countries' joint commitment to addressing and defeating terrorism with the support of the United Nations. Regional cooperation offers opportunities to address common concerns, including countering terrorist financing, improving border security, fostering dialogue with religious institutions and leaders, and countering human trafficking and drug smuggling. The upcoming meeting of the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation will be an opportunity for the Afghan Government to set out its vision for a more structured peace and security process coordinated with the wider region, including regional

efforts to fight terrorism and violent extremism. The United Nations stands ready to support those efforts.

With greater regional collaboration and investment, Central Asia and Afghanistan have the potential to become symbols of dialogue, peace and the promotion of contacts among cultures, religions and civilizations. The United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan are cooperating closely and continue to seek out new ways to deepen their support. The entire United Nations family stands ready to assist in promoting greater cooperation and integration among the countries of Central Asia and Afghanistan towards achieving the goals of peace, sustainable development, stability and security.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan.

At the outset, let me express my sincere gratitude to Secretary-General Guterres, all my colleagues from Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and other high-level participants in this extremely important meeting.

Representing Central Asia in the Security Council for the first time in the history of the United Nations, Kazakhstan is honoured to sponsor this debate on building a regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model for linking security and development objectives. That was the vision that His Excellency Mr. Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of Kazakhstan, proposed in his policy address, which I presented to the Security Council last year (see S/PV.7857): to create a model zone of peace, security and cooperation in Central Asia; to transform the landlocked region into a landlinked one by connecting it to neighbouring regions through trade, transit, transportation and energy exchanges; and to ensure that stability in Afghanistan also contributes to prosperity in the wider region, thereby becoming secure and growing prosperous together. We have a Kazakh proverb that expresses the sentiment succinctly: "The core of happiness is found in unity".

As Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) and the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1267 (1999) concerning Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities, and, this month, as President of the Security Council, Kazakhstan is keen on underlining the importance of an inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process and reconciliation. Our Permanent Representative, Mr. Kairat Umarov, led a visit by the Security Council this past week to Kabul, during which Council members met with President Ghani and a number of officials. They were updated on plans concerning the peace process and underscored the importance of the holding of credible and inclusive parliamentary elections in 2018 and presidential ones in 2019.

Kazakhstan is also keen on garnering international support for peace and stability in Afghanistan. We recognize ongoing international efforts in that regard, such as the new American strategy for Afghanistan and South Asia, consultations on Afghanistan in the Moscow format and China's Belt and Road Initiative, which will undoubtedly contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the wider region. As a country geographically located in the wider region surrounding Afghanistan, we also have a direct and legitimate interest in solving common threats, addressing challenges and reaping common benefits.

We recognize that stabilization and reconstruction in Afghanistan will also present an opportunity for Central Asian countries to coordinate their efforts and reinvigorate regional cooperation. Kazakhstan, which has always stood behind integration processes in Central Asia, is very much encouraged by increasing efforts fostering mutual understanding and trust in the region. Central Asian Foreign Ministers held a number of five-party meetings in 2016 and 2017 — with the most recent one having taken place last night — which resulted in the adoption of the first-ever joint ministerial statement and joint programme of cooperation for the period from 2018 to 2019 on November 2017 in Samarkand. In the future, we may see Afghanistan join that platform for dialogue.

We hope that increased dialogue and connectivity will help solve common problems and address challenges. One such threat is the intensification of the activities of terrorist groups, particularly the the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (Da'esh) in the northern parts of Afghanistan and the potential return of foreign terrorist fighters to their countries of origin, including Central Asia. We are also concerned about the threat posed by narcotics production in Afghanistan and recognize the importance of close coordination between Afghanistan and Central Asian States in combating the

cultivation, production, trade and trafficking of illicit drugs in Afghanistan. We plan on cooperating more closely with Afghanistan through existing institutions dedicated to that problem, including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre.

But it would be a mistake to consider Afghanistan solely as a source of insecurity and instability. With its immense potential, its favourable geography and considerable human capital, Afghanistan could, and should, also be seen as a strong partner for joint economic projects. We therefore join our Central Asian neighbours in our legitimate interest in intensifying joint efforts in supporting peace, security and development in Afghanistan, while calling on global Powers to contribute to making our region an arena of regional cooperation.

The Council's visit to Afghanistan last week identified a number of security issues and the prospect of finding a possible solution to the situation based on large-scale bilateral and multilateral investments into Afghanistan, with a view not only to support growth and integration into global economic processes, but also as an investment in peace. Additional information about the outcome of the visit was presented two days ago at the special briefing to the Security Council by Kazakhstan's Permanent Representative, who led the trip.

Common geography, economic complementarity and cultural ties between the people of Central Asia and Afghanistan facilitate cooperation. But we also believe that long-term stability and prosperity in the region, as in any other region, should also be guided by the principle of an integrated approach based on the following three pillars.

The first is the recognition and strengthening of the security-development nexus. That means that investment in trade, transit routes, transport and infrastructure development should also be seen as stabilization assets. In that regard, we are confident that the projects pursued by Central Asian countries with Afghanistan — such as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project, the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project and other planned railways and roads — will not support not only connectivity for Central Asian countries but also contribute to stability in Afghanistan, the creation of jobs and to the development of infrastructure the region. Those projects will strengthen links among nations and diffuse potential tensions.

The second pillar is a regional approach. Regional cooperation is imperative given that threats do not recognize borders and are of common and transnational character for our countries, and therefore require a common approach and solution. A good example is our joint efforts on countering terrorism. Central Asia was the first region to develop a joint plan of action to implement the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in 2011. Kazakhstan has now contributed $300,000 to implement the plan. We hope to increase cooperation with Afghanistan through the joint plan of action, including in border security, data sharing, cooperation on fighting against financing of terrorism and so on.

We have also been striving to implement an integrated solution for the management of common water and energy resources in Central Asia. We recognize the need to intensify cooperation on water sharing with Afghanistan in that regard. We call for the streamlining of efforts by the myriad regional organizations operating in Central Asia and Afghanistan and the different regional frameworks, such as the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, the United Nations Special Programme for Economies of Central Asia and the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Programme, to name a few. Such institutions can help promote the Sustainable Development Goals at the regional level. We also commend the role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia in collaborating closely to facilitate the bilateral and multilateral engagement of Central Asian States with Afghanistan.

The third pillar of a successful strategy is a coordinated transparent approach led by the United Nations agencies. Streamlined operations under the One United Nations approach are vital in the light of rapidly diminishing development aid. We reiterate the importance of maximizing the efficiency and efficacy of the work of the United Nations in Afghanistan and Central Asia, including through enhanced coordination across the United Nations system.

We also call on the donor community to increase its contribution to peace and development in and around Afghanistan and to improve the performance

and accountability of official development assistance. Kazakhstan is working to create a United Nations-led regional hub in Almaty designed to help deliver coordinated support for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals to the countries of the region. We believe that the three-pillar approach of economic development, regional cooperation and international coordination could be better used to forge a model of regional peace and development.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our confidence that the Central Asian countries and Afghanistan have the potential to build a stable and prosperous region, while playing an important role in attaining global peace and security.

I wish the Council a very fruitful discussion today.

I now resume my functions as the President of the Council.

I now call on the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait.

Mr. Al Sabah (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, Mr. Kairat Abdrakhmanov, for convening today's important meeting, which demonstrates the importance of establishing effective regional and subregional partnerships in order to strengthen security and development. It reflects the provisions of Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, which underscores the clear role of regional and subregional organizations in resolving conflicts through peaceful and diplomatic means. I would also like to thank the delegation of Kazakhstan for preparing the concept note (S/2018/7, annex), which demonstrates the importance of effective partnership in restoring development and security in Afghanistan, which only serves to strengthen security in Central Asia and throughout the world. I would also like to take this opportunity to commend the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres, for his excellent briefing at the start of the meeting.

The holding of today's meeting, under the presidency of friendly Kazakhstan, demonstrates the importance the countries of Central Asia attach to a return to normalcy in Afghanistan and to the restoration of stability and security. The meeting highlights the efforts made to develop a long-term political and economic plan for Afghanistan that involves the country's neighbours. Given the complex regional environment, we emphasize that close cooperation among neighbouring States is essential for strengthening stability and prosperity and will contribute to ensuring sustainable peace.

My Government appreciates the visit of the Security Council to Afghanistan under Kazakhstan's presidency of the Council, which took place few days before the convening of this meeting. The visit underscores the interest and support of the Security Council for the Government and the people of Afghanistan as part of the efforts of the Government and of the international community to achieve security, stability and reconstruction. It also demonstrates support for democracy and Afghanistan's full return to its normal place in the international community.

Kuwait also notes the important role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). We appreciate the vital role of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, as well as that of all other United Nations personnel working on the ground in an extremely dangerous setting. In that regard, we note that since September 2010 Kuwait has hosted the UNAMA Support Office. We would like to continue our cooperation with that Office in order to overcome all the difficulties it could encounter. We must ensure that we provide all the assistance necessary to the Office. The State of Kuwait underscores that it is important to strengthen regional partnerships, as well as the role of all United Nations agencies in restoring peace and security in Afghanistan. My country welcomes all international and regional initiatives aimed at supporting such efforts, in accordance with resolution 2344 (2017).

Kuwait would like to express its continued support for the Secretary-General's call for efforts to be made to prevent threats in Afghanistan and Central Asia, and to ensure that conflict prevention and resolution become the main focus of the work of the United Nations in the region, while stressing the importance of preventive diplomacy through, inter-alia, constructive engagement on the part of Member States in order to ensure long-term stability, security and development.

Concerning the importance of preventive diplomacy and regional cooperation, it is important to note the role of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, which is an example of political engagement and preventive efforts on the part

of the United Nations to support its Member States. We encourage Afghanistan to cooperate with the Centre.

Afghanistan has for four decades been experiencing unstable and difficult political and security situations, with negative impacts on the economic and humanitarian situation as well as on regional and international peace and security. It is therefore important to pool the efforts of the international community to tackle these complex challenges. The deterioration of the security situation in the country has slowed economic growth and hampered progress in the political process. We note that the parliamentary elections to be held in July 2018 and the presidential elections in 2019 have been delayed, and that we were looking forward to see them held according to the set timetable.

The deterioration of the security situation has also aggravated the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. The number of civilians requiring urgent humanitarian assistance has reached 3.3 million people. Millions of Afghans have become internally displaced persons or refugees. The worsening of the security situation has also led to an increase in the unemployment rate to 25 per cent, while 40 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line.

We would like to express our concern regarding the continued threats to security and stability in Afghanistan owing to the presence of terrorists and extremist groups such as the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. We note also the presence of other illegal armed and criminal groups, including producers and traffickers of narcotics. We are also worried about the threats that this represents for the region, in particular for Central Asian countries. That is why we call on all States to effectively implement all the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, in particular those pertaining to combating terrorism, and to strengthen international and regional security cooperation so as to promote information exchange and border control, law enforcement and criminal justice, in order to improve the capabilities to address the threats, including that of the return of foreign terrorist fighters.

Kuwait would like to see a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the region. We welcome the contribution made by the States of Central Asia to non-proliferation, including the Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia, and we encourage them to increase their cooperation in preventing illicit trafficking in nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and other radioactive materials.

In conclusion, Afghanistan must not be seen as a threat to regional security but as a key partner. Achieving sustainable peace and stability in Afghanistan and in the region requires peaceful and diplomatic solutions. All parties involved must come to the negotiating table and participate effectively and constructively in diplomatic efforts aimed at restoring peace. Military solutions, as history has demonstrated, have never led to lasting solutions for peace. We urge all parties to participate constructively in diplomatic efforts to establish peace, so that Afghanistan and its people can enjoy prosperity and well-being.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland.

Mr. Czaputowicz (Poland): Let me start by congratulating you, Mr. President, and your country, Kazakhstan, on your successful presidency of the Council and commend Astana's initiative to organize this timely debate on building regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia. I also highly commend your leadership in convening the recent Security Council visiting mission to Afghanistan, which contributed greatly to this debate.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and his continuous commitment to conflict prevention and sustaining peace.

First, I would like to stress the importance of regional cooperation as an effective means not only of promoting the economic and social development of Afghanistan, but also to promote peace and stability. From my country's perspective, the diversification of economic ties in Central Asian countries serves both their sovereignty and interests well. Central Asia and Afghanistan's location presents a unique opportunity to enhance direct and multinational cooperation aimed at constructing transport and logistics infrastructure that will interconnect Europe and Asia. Those valuable links will facilitate the exchange of not only goods but also ideas and people-to-people contacts as well as mutual understanding.

We are glad to note the recent developments in the region in the field of connectivity. Projects such as the Turkmenistan — Afghanistan — Pakistan — India pipeline, CASA-1000, the railway to Herat and the air-cargo corridor between Afghanistan and India are

excellent examples of the diverse benefits that regional cooperation can bring. We believe that these investments will not only contribute to the region's prosperity, but will also build trust between neighbours.

In this context, we would like to commend the Governments of Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey for having signed the Lapis Lazuli Corridor Agreement. We believe that this vital document will facilitate one of the most effective ways of linking Afghanistan to European markets as well as help diminish its dependence on neighbouring countries in terms of transit and transportation.

We must remember that even the most ambitious agenda with regard to regional economic connectivity may fail owing to an unstable security situation, as a secure, stable and prosperous Afghanistan is a prerequisite for peace and stability in the region as a whole. We are alarmed by the continuing high level of violence in numerous Afghan cities and the resulting number of civilian casualties.

Regarding the improvement in security, we welcome the Afghan Government's four-year security-sector reform plan, in the hope that it will strengthen the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. However, military success is only a means to an end, which is to achieve peace.

We are deeply convinced that an inclusive, Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process is the only viable long-term solution to ending the conflict. We hope that the Kabul Process brings much-needed progress, but we would like to underline the importance of the negotiations being inclusive.

On 1 January 2015, NATO launched the Resolute Support Mission, a non-combat mission whose purpose is to help Afghan security forces and institutions develop the capabilities they need to defend Afghanistan and protect its citizens in a sustainable manner. In other words, its aim is to create conditions for the country's future successful development. Poland has been engaged in the Resolute Support Mission since its inception and has continued to increase its contribution. We are also proud to have participated in the operations of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), starting in 2002. The Polish military contingent in ISAF was one of its biggest and most successful. I would like to emphasize that our military efforts have always been complemented by our development assistance to Afghanistan, mostly through contributions to the multilateral assistance mechanisms of the United Nations system and the World Bank.

Another serious threat to the security of the wider region as well as Afghanistan is narcotics production. Despite the Afghan Government's efforts, drugs remain one of the largest sources of terrorists' income. It is therefore crucial to identify and coordinate both international and regional efforts to tackle that problem. We would like to thank the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia (UNRCCA) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime for their hard work in addressing the issue of the production of narcotics, and we invite other regional organizations to coordinate their endeavours with them. At this point, I would like to emphasize support for UNRCCA's multidimensional approach to regional security in Afghanistan and Central Asia, including in the areas of transport, environment, food and energy security, and its focus on new threats to peace and security. Poland also greatly appreciates the work of UNAMA and the comprehensive support it provides to Afghanistan and its people.

Together with our partners in the European Union (EU), we have identified four priority areas that are critical to achieving progress in Afghanistan. They include promoting peace, stability and regional security, reinforcing democracy, the rule of law and human rights, promoting good governance and women's empowerment, and supporting economic and human development and addressing challenges related to migration. Those priorities are the pillars of the new EU strategy on Afghanistan and show our engagement and commitment to the country. We hope that the Afghan Government will work with us to implement that vital strategy.

In conclusion, I would like to underline that Poland has been a long-term partner of Afghanistan and the region. We remain committed to further strengthening peace, stability and the development of Afghanistan and Central Asia, and we are taking action to that end.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, I would like to highlight Kazakhstan's consistent and responsible approach to advancing issues that are priorities for Central Asia and its focus on solving specific problems facing the region.

We welcome the initiative of our friends from Kazakhstan in convening today's debate on an issue that is an urgent one for many countries and takes on particular significance against the backdrop of the growing terrorist and narcotic threats emanating from Afghanistan, which are having a destabilizing effect on Central Asia and spilling over its borders.

Northern Afghanistan is becoming a base of support for international terrorism, led by the Afghan wing of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, which is establishing a springboard for realizing its destructive ambitions in the region in the spirit of the caliphate's notorious ideology. With the flagrant collusion and sometimes direct support of both external and local sponsors, thousands of fighters of various nationalities are entering the region under the banner of ISIL, including jihadists who escaped defeat in Syria. They openly proclaim that their goal is overturning the legitimate Governments of Central Asian States and spreading their influence throughout Eurasia.

In the past year we saw unprecedented growth in Afghan narcotics production, as my Polish colleague just mentioned. It will be essential to take urgent measures to curb this threat, which fuels international terrorism, undermines the stability of States and the health of young people and triggers crime and corruption. The development of a comprehensive strategy to combat drug trafficking was the focus of an international conference of parliamentarians against drugs organized by the Russian State Duma in Moscow in December. We welcomed the participation in the conference of representatives from the United Nations, along with a host of Russian and international non-governmental organizations.

The situation in Afghanistan requires a comprehensive approach on the part of the States of the region and the international community as a whole. The experience of the past 20 years is vivid testament to the futility of attempts to use force to solve the problems plaguing Afghanistan. What is on the agenda is adopting practical measures to launch a process of national reconciliation on a basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions. Guided by those views, we have launched a dialogue in the Moscow format in conjunction with our partners and like-minded stakeholders, reviving the work of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization-Afghanistan Contact Group. We are building a partnership between Afghanistan and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. We welcome the initiative of Uzbekistan to convene a ministerial meeting this spring on a settlement of the Afghan settlement. We continue to assist Kabul in training national civilian and law-enforcement personnel to strengthen the military capabilities of the Afghan armed forces. We consistently advocate for starting direct talks as soon as possible between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban movement, based on criteria approved by the Security Council, in the interests of ending their fratricidal war.

As security issues are addressed, one of the major factors in stabilizing Afghanistan must be sustained socioeconomic development. Both the Eurasian Economic Union and the Commonwealth of Independent States can contribute to the general efforts by opening broad and promising markets in Afghanistan. Russia is open to multilateral cooperation in implementing major economic and infrastructure-based projects, including the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project and the Central Asia-South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade project.

At the heart of our alliance and strategic partnership with the Central Asian States is shared history, a high degree of mutual trust and unified approaches to major current issues. Our trade and economic ties provide a sound foundation. Russian investments in the region total $20 billion, with more than 7,500 Russian companies and joint ventures with Russian capital working productively in the area. During the past decade the aggregate volume of our assistance to Central Asian countries exceeded $6 billion, both bilaterally and through international organizations, including within the framework of the implementation of the Goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We believe that the region's issues regarding the energy supplies and access to water resources should be addressed through constructive dialogue and a mutual consideration of interests in the areas of hydropower and agriculture in order to benefit all the peoples of the region. The particular geographical location of Central Asian countries determines the importance of improving the effectiveness of making use of various forms of transportation for providing reliable trade and economic links with States in the Asia-Pacific region, including South Asia and Europe. Russia stands ready to contribute to that process through the development of East-West and North-South international corridors. In order to achieve that, we are working to establish a

single transit system through the Eurasian Economic Union and its Chinese counterpart, the Belt and Road Initiative. That approach will enable the Central Asian region to strengthen its role in the continental transportation system.

Eurasia today needs mutually beneficial cooperation based on a balance of interests. External actors should do everything they can to facilitate this without trying to drag the countries in the region into a zero-sum game, the notion of which appeared in the concept of a so-called greater Central Asia, which it seemed might happily have been forgotten but which has recently reared its head again. Central Asian countries should not be presented with a false choice between South and North. The region needs a constructive environment and partnership with all stakeholders, and certainly all its countries must respect all their obligations within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Eurasian Economic Community. The large-scale plans aimed ultimately at improving the well-being of the peoples of Central Asia and Afghanistan can become a reality only when there is lasting peace and stability throughout the Asian continent.

Russia has consistently worked to bring together efforts in the interests of establishing an architecture of equal and indivisible security that reflects contemporary realities in the Asia-Pacific region. The prospects for stability, peace and prosperity for States in the region are closely linked to the ongoing development of a fairer, more democratic and polycentric world order, based on international law and respect for the cultural and civilizational diversity of the peoples of the world.

Mr. Sullivan (United States of America): It is a pleasure to be here today. Before I continue, I would like to take this opportunity to express my condolences to the Governments of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and to the families of the victims of the tragic bus accident in Kazakhstan that claimed the lives of more than 50 Uzbek citizens yesterday.

On behalf of the United States, President Trump and Secretary Tillerson, I would like to thank Foreign Minister Abdrakhmanov for convening today's ministerial meeting on the exceedingly important topic of Afghanistan's security and development. I thank the Government of Kazakhstan for its leadership and for promoting stronger ties between Afghanistan and its neighbours in Central Asia. I would also like to express our appreciation to the Governments of the Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan for their joint and individual efforts to draw the region closer together through our partnership with the five Central Asian countries, as well as for their deliberations on how the region might more closely engage Afghanistan, thereby contributing to the region's shared stability.

I would also like to thank Secretary-General Guterres and his United Nations team, especially the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, for their dedication and exceptional work. The Secretary-General's visit to the country in June, as well as the Council's trip to Kabul last week, highlighted the international community's commitment to Afghanistan. I know that Ambassador Haley was impressed during her trip by the resilience of the Afghan people in the face of insurgent and extremist violence, as well as by Afghanistan's willingness to take ownership of its challenges. The United States is heartened by the progress that we are already seeing following the announcement of President Trump's South Asia strategy.

Before we turn to its challenges, we must not forget that Afghanistan is a fundamentally different country today from what it was 20 years ago. That should give the Taliban pause if it expects to roll back the progress that has been made. In Afghanistan today, millions of girls and boys attend school. The population has access to basic health services and 90 per cent of the population has cell-phone access. Citizens have dozens of independent radio and television stations to turn to for information and entertainment, as well as hundreds of print media outlets. Such advances instil confidence in the country's commitment to continuing progress in increasing development. Yet despite that progress, the ongoing conflict continues to roil the country, causing severe political, security, humanitarian and human rights challenges.

This year the stakes are clear. The Government of Afghanistan must continue to reform in order to foster better lives for Afghans of all ethnicities and to promote the country's long-term security and stability. It is critical to ensure that the preparations for parliamentary elections in 2018 and the presidential election in 2019 move forward on schedule, peacefully and democratically, and that the Government continues to work on its commitments to fighting corruption and supporting inclusive governance.

Since announcing our strategy for South Asia last August, President Trump has underscored that the United States will continue to support the Afghan Government and its security forces in their fight against the Taliban, as well as in their efforts to combat Al-Qaida, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) and other terrorist groups. The United States and our allies have suffered grave losses in this fight alongside our Afghan brothers and sisters. We will not allow Afghanistan to serve as a safe haven for terrorists, as it did before 11 September 2001. The President has also made it abundantly clear that solving Afghanistan's security and development challenges will depend on the commitment of Afghans themselves, together with the steadfast support of Afghanistan's regional and international partners. As we move ahead we must continue to support the principle that an enduring peace for Afghanistan is one that is built, led and ultimately maintained by the Afghan Government and its people. This Afghan-led and -owned approach, paired with firm international support for the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, will make it clear to the Taliban that victory cannot be won on the battlefield. Any solution must be political.

We have emphasized that our support is conditions-based and not driven by timelines. Continued violence will only serve to perpetuate war and thereby hurt all Afghan people, including the Taliban. With a united international community standing firm, the Taliban will come to understand that the only way forward is to engage in a reconciliation process that culminates in all parties working towards a tolerant, accountable and united Government of Afghanistan set in a peaceful and successful nation. A necessary outcome of any peace agreement must include an absolute commitment from the Taliban that it will cut ties to terrorism, cease violence and accept the Afghan Constitution, which includes protection for the rights of women and minorities.

We must recognize the reality that while the Afghan Government has been adamant about its interest in initiating peace talks with the Taliban, there has been no reciprocal interest on the part of the Taliban. That must change. To achieve that, we must all work together to isolate the Taliban, eliminate its sources of revenue and equipment and demonstrate with united and unwavering commitment that the only place it can achieve its objectives will be at the negotiating table, not on the battlefield. Unfortunately, the international community has so far fallen short in providing that kind of unified support to the Afghan Government. We have seen certain countries pursue counterproductive strategies that provide support to the Taliban in the name of countering ISIS. That approach is misguided or, worse, pernicious. The United States believes that the two are not linked. We can and must fight ISIS in Afghanistan while ensuring that the Taliban is forced to the negotiating table.

Working closely with our Afghan partners, we have made significant progress against ISIS in eastern Afghanistan. Together we have maintained persistent pressure on ISIS, significantly reducing its territory and eliminating one third of its fighters. Supporting the Taliban serves only to prolong the conflict and foster an unstable and insecure environment that ISIS exploits in order to threaten Afghanistan and the broader region.

Ultimately, if we are to defeat ISIS in Afghanistan and prevent the group's spread across the region, every country in this Chamber must be aligned in its strategy and commitment to following through. Ineffective strategies that enable insurgent groups must cease. Instead we need to join together and provide unwavering support for the Afghan Government.

We know that an important part of this unified approach is Pakistan, which has suffered grievously from the effects of terrorism. That country therefore can, and should be, an integral partner in our shared efforts to achieve peace and stability within the region. We seek to work cohesively and effectively with Pakistan, but cannot be successful if the status quo of terrorist organizations being given sanctuary inside the country's borders is allowed to continue. Stability and prosperity in Afghanistan would benefit Pakistan as well, since it would enable the return of refugees and remove the ability of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and other terrorist groups to operate against Pakistan from outside the country.

That is why Pakistan should join our efforts to bring about a resolution to the conflict, as spelled out in our South Asia strategy. The strategy, as I have outlined it today, will prove successful with commitment and patience. As Afghans take ownership, as the international community isolates the Taliban, then peace, stability and security will follow, as well development. As Afghanistan stands taller through peace, it will naturally contribute to the larger regional, economic and security environment underpinning the

long-term success of Central Asia. The United States shares with the countries of Central Asia a commitment to peace, stability and prosperity. The only way we can achieve those goals is through a mutual understanding of the threats we confront and the opportunities we can cultivate together.

In conclusion, the United States welcomes the Council and the Secretary-General's recognition that peace, progress and development is ultimately attained through regional and international cooperation. We all have a stake in Afghanistan's success. Increased stability, economic progress and regional integration will benefit every country represented in this Chamber, and none more so than the countries in Afghanistan's immediate neighbourhood. But it must start with the Taliban deciding to take their first steps towards peace. If we hold firm and present a united front, we will come ever closer to the day when the promise of peace becomes a reality.

Mr. Haspels (Netherlands): It is an honour for me to address the Security Council for the first time since the Kingdom of the Netherlands began its 2018 membership. Right before I entered the Chamber this morning, I spoke with two of Afghanistan's leading citizens — Roya Mahboob and her sister Elaha. They founded an organization to teach Afghan girls programming and robotics. Both of the girls are present here today, sitting high up there in the gallery. Roya, Elaha and their students are a living example of what has been achieved in Afghanistan. Thanks to their organization, Afghan girls today can study in Herat, where they are learning to build robots for hospitals and farms.

The difference between today and the Taliban era could not be greater. Back then, women were marginalized to the point of complete invisibility. Today, they can study, travel, make films and build robots. Since the fall of the brutal Taliban regime, a lot has been achieved. In only 16 years, life has improved greatly in Afghanistan.

But when we spoke, Roya and her sister reminded me of the many obstacles Afghans still face. The security situation is still volatile. Access to justice is limited. There are still barriers to girls who want to go to school. Insecurity and corruption are hampering economic growth. As a result, Afghans are seeking shelter and opportunity elsewhere.

That is one of the reasons why the Kingdom of the Netherlands supports Afghanistan in its efforts to improve the lives of its people. We chose an integrated approach — combining military, development and political efforts; investing in security, good governance, the rule of law and accountability — together with other countries, partners and, of course, Afghans themselves.

Our contribution to peace and security in Afghanistan has sometimes involved painful sacrifices. We will remember those who paid the ultimate prize with great respect.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan plays a key role in coordinating the many elements of the international effort in Afghanistan. As a penholder on Afghanistan in the Council, we look forward to working with all members to ensure that the United Nations can continue to play its essential role after March.

But in the long run, true stability in Afghanistan can be guaranteed only through an inclusive peace and reconciliation process that is Afghan-led and -owned. The Kabul Process meeting in February must bring us closer to that goal. It is paramount that all neighbouring countries take up their responsibilities by actively contributing to that goal.

At the same time, we encourage the Afghan Government to continue on the path of reform, to continue the fight against corruption, to strengthen good governance and the rule of law and to uphold human rights and hold timely and credible elections — because only a secure and stable Afghanistan can offer the Afghan people the opportunities they so deserve.

That is what today's debate is all about: the need to achieve long-term peace, stability and development in Afghanistan. In that regard, the region also has an important role to play. I commend the Republic of Kazakhstan and other Central Asian nations for their efforts to increase regional cooperation, especially where economic ties are concerned.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Kazakhstan for arranging this highly topical debate, I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and I thank Minister Karzai of Afghanistan for his Government's leadership.

Roya and Elaha remind us that we need to invest in young Afghans. After all, the future stability of the country will depend upon the prospects that Afghanistan can offer them. We all have a responsibility

here. The Kingdom of the Netherlands will remain a committed partner, both during our term on the Council and beyond.

Mr. Field (United Kingdom): I commend you, Mr. President, for your leadership, your foresight and diplomacy in convening this important and timely debate. I also thank the Secretary-General for his insightful briefing. As many have observed during the course of this debate, regional partnerships are crucial to achieving long-term peace and security. That is particularly important when we consider the future prosperity of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is making genuine sustainable progress in overcoming its many challenges. I saw that myself when I visited Kabul only three months ago. The international community has a crucial role to play in encouraging and promoting that progress, as do the regional partnerships and the initiatives that have been discussed here today. We warmly welcome the efforts under way to improve the links between Afghanistan and its regional partners in South and Central Asia. I believe that is critical to achieving greater economic development in Afghanistan, which of course is an essential factor for long-term stability. Such cooperation will help find common economic interests to reduce frictions and provide further avenues for resolving disputes.

The Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project is a great example of the benefits of this type of regional cooperation. Afghanistan and its neighbours have worked together and alongside the international community to overcome significant challenges, bringing that important endeavour to the point of implementation. We are confident that much more regional cooperation will now follow. There is a clear appetite for it within some of the most important regional groups, such as in the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan and the Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference. I believe that today's meeting is an important opportunity to demonstrate the Council's wholehearted support for that type of cooperation.

However, there is still a long way to go before Afghanistan's Government and people achieve their goal of building a more stable and prosperous country. The United Kingdom will continue to play our part within the international community in supporting that goal. We have committed up to £750 million for the four years up to 2020 to help support the Afghan Government's work to improve security, reduce poverty and increase broad access to health and education. We are also working closely with in NATO to support Afghanistan. Our non-combat troops have played a crucial role in supporting the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. Through the National Army Officer Academy, we have helped to train over 3,000 cadets — Afghanistan's military leaders of the future.

But ultimately, I am sure that, as others have done, or will do, during the course of this debate, the solution to long-term peace and stability lies not within the military but in a peace process that is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. That is why the forthcoming meeting of the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation is so very important. We encourage all of Afghanistan's regional partners to fully support those efforts towards peace. It takes vision, courage and leadership to begin a conversation with your adversary after years of violence and bloodshed. However, the time is now surely ripe for that conversation. The people of Afghanistan deserve peace. We therefore urge President Ghani and the Government to use the meeting to reach out to the insurgents and to try to launch a credible peace process. All of us here today should collectively and individually express our full support for this peace process, which is vital to Afghanistan's long-term stability.

Credible, inclusive and timely elections are also essential. We commend the work of various United Nations bodies in helping the Government to prepare for parliamentary and presidential elections this year and next.

In conclusion, Afghanistan continues to face a number of significant challenges in 2018, but this is also a year of real opportunity. With timely elections and the launch of a credible political and peace process, this year has the potential to be the one that Afghanistan finally and irreversible turns a corner. However, as the United States Deputy Secretary of State so rightly pointed out, the commitment to this must be conditions-based, and not driven by timelines. We need, at times, to be patient. That is in everyone's interests — most of all that of the Afghan people, who have waited so very long peace. Let us therefore all pledge today to do everything we can within the Security Council and beyond to support the efforts to bring about that peace and stability.

Mr. Mituy Edjang (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I convey to everyone warm greetings and a happy new year on behalf of His Excellency President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea. The Government of Equatorial Guinea expresses its gratitude to the United Nations and to the Government of Kazakhstan for having jointly organized this high-level meeting on Afghanistan and Central Asia. We also thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his briefing, as well as the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan for his statement later in this meeting.

This meeting reflects the strategic importance and specific role of Afghanistan and Central Asia as a whole and the importance the international community attaches to them. We firmly believe that this region has great potential for development and the resources required to achieve it, but that will also require the contributions, collaboration and cooperation of all. The international community must therefore continue supporting the efforts of the Afghan Government to achieve stability, security and sustainable and lasting development.

The endemic security problems and their ramifications are the main obstacle to achieving that goal. As today's agenda indicates, security and development are closely linked. The commitment of all the States of Central Asia to the development of Afghanistan requires their cooperation on security.

A regional approach is required in order to address the problem jointly. Equatorial Guinea condemns the existence of safe havens for terrorists in the region, which are used for training and preparing attacks — not only in Afghanistan but all around the world. The support of the international community for such an approach is crucial, including on the part of the most developed countries and of the United Nations.

Equatorial Guinea welcomes the approach of Afghanistan's Central Asian regional neighbours, which view the country as a partner but also believe that Afghans themselves must lead an internal peace process to bring about prosperity and stability for the country, and must enjoy the support of the countries of the region because, as has been shown, there can be no regional stability without a stable Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's security and stability are important for the entire region, as we continue to see worrying and increasing terrorist activities carried out by associated persons, groups, business and entities in Afghanistan that pose serious threats not only to Afghanistan but to all countries in Central Asia.

The United Nations as a whole has an important role to play in those efforts. We are happy to see that, as a result of the support and activities of the United Nations Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and regional organizations, the region has strengthened capacities to overcome challenges to peace, stability and sustainable development, including in such areas as the fight against terrorism, transnational organized crime, the fight against drug trafficking, trafficking in persons, illegal immigration and the use of the Internet for terrorism.

A key consideration for lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan is the need to accelerate social and economic development in order to improve the living standards of the population. The international community must redouble its efforts to support the Afghan Government in implementing the Afghanistan Compact and the national development strategy so as to make progress in economic development and in improving infrastructure, education, health, human rights, the rule of law and other areas. It must be ensured that the dividends of development are beneficial to, and shared by, the entire Afghan people.

The adoption of an integrated approach is crucial to combat opium cultivation and drug trafficking. The issue of drugs impacts negatively not only on Afghanistan's economy, livelihoods, security and stability, but also on the capacity of the Government, as well as on the customs and beliefs of its people. We hope that the Afghan Government will tackle the problem thoroughly in coordination and cooperation with its neighbours and the international community, and that it will intensify its efforts in the fight against drugs with comprehensive measures.

The role of Afghanistan's neighbours in the region is crucial and, together with the international community, they should continue their efforts to fulfil their commitments and support the Afghan Government and people. Equatorial Guinea calls for continued assistance to the country while respecting the interests, desires and specific characteristics of the Afghan people. Afghanistan's development is tied to the development of the whole of Central Asia. We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our gratitude to

Kazakhstan for its initiative in organizing this public debate, as well as for the remarkable trip to Kabul by all 15 members of the Security Council during which a consensus was reached on supporting Afghanistan in its efforts to achieve development and to normalize its situation. I would also like to commend the hospitality and warm welcome that all of us, including Equatorial Guinea, received from the Afghan Government.

In conclusion, Equatorial Guinea accepts and supports the presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/2) adopted at this meeting and believes that its publication will help to promote development, stability and peace in Afghanistan and the Central Asian region.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China): The delegation of China would like to welcome Foreign Minister Abdrakhmanov and thank him for convening today's debate. We are also grateful to the Secretary-General for his briefing.

In the current context, ensuring peace and stability in Afghanistan is crucial to the vital interests and long-term welfare of the Afghan people as well as to the security, development and prosperity of the region as a whole. Central Asia is generally stable and has enormous development potential. China supports the quest for solutions from a regional perspective and the adoption of a comprehensive approach, with a view to achieving lasting peace and shared development in Afghanistan and Central Asia. We appreciate the Afghan Government's efforts to maintain national stability, facilitate national reconciliation and promote economic development, and we value the important role played in dealing with the issue of Afghanistan by its neighbours and other relevant countries of the region, including those in Central Asia. However, we have to keep in mind the fact that Afghanistan is still facing many political, security and economic challenges, and that the international community should continue to provide it with staunch support.

First, all the parties must remain committed to promoting a settlement of the Afghanistan issue through political dialogue and reconciliation. All stakeholders in Afghanistan should work to strengthen their unity and actively participate in reconciliation, making the long-term interests and welfare of the people their top priority. The international community should continue to promote efforts to achieve a broad, inclusive political reconciliation that is Afghan-led and -owned, and encourage the relevant actors in Afghanistan to launch peace talks as soon as possible, as well as welcoming all assistance provided by countries of the region and relevant mechanisms. The international community should also fully respect the Afghan people's right to independently choose their own political system and development path, and should support the Government in increasing its capacity to govern.

Secondly, maintaining peace and stability is the foundation of Afghanistan's national reconstruction and development. The international community should continue to support the capacity-building of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, enhance the country's independent self-defence capabilities and work together to effectively address the threats posed by terrorism, transnational crime and narcotics trafficking. While efforts at the regional level are essential to assisting Afghanistan in responding to such challenges, promoting the achievement of peace and stability there can also contribute to improving the security situation in Central Asia and the region as a whole. The international community should enhance its cooperation and coordination in fighting terrorist elements in the region, avoid finger-pointing and support the important role played by entities such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in regional counter-terrorism efforts.

Thirdly, integration into regional economies is ultimately the way forward for Afghanistan in the areas of peace and reconstruction. The countries of Central Asia and the wider region are close neighbours of Afghanistan and share interests with the Afghan people where regional development is concerned. Development in Afghanistan cannot be achieved without the support and assistance of those countries, while in turn prosperity for the region as a whole will not be possible without the economic development of Afghanistan. Stability and development in the region are in the common interests of Afghanistan and its neighbours. China hopes that the relevant countries will strengthen their cooperation and work together for peace and prosperity in the region. The international community should make active efforts to fulfil its pledges of assistance and support the Afghan Government's efforts to promote economic and social development. In accordance with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, all parties should work to build a community with a shared future for humankind, in the spirit of win-win cooperation, and promote the development and regional cooperation of Afghanistan and Central Asia through the Belt and

Road Initiative and other endeavours aimed at regional cooperation on the economic and trade fronts.

As a friendly neighbour of Afghanistan, China has been playing a constructive role in promoting its peace and development. On 26 December last year in Beijing, our Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, convened and chaired the first dialogue between the Foreign Ministers of China, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Its purpose is, first, to help Afghanistan and Pakistan improve and develop their relations; secondly, to support the peace, reconstruction and reconciliation process in Afghanistan; thirdly, to enhance trilateral cooperation on security and work jointly to combat terrorism; and fourthly, to promote international cooperation on the One and Road Initiative and explore effective ways to achieve trilateral connectivity and economic integration. The three Foreign Ministers agreed on three major themes — mutual political trust and reconciliation, development and connectivity, and cooperation on security and counter-terrorism. The trilateral cooperation will focus on those three areas. They also reached consensus on a number of important issues in areas related to people's livelihoods, such as health, human resources and agriculture.

China stands ready to cooperate with the international community in working tirelessly for peace, stability and development in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I would like to align myself with the statement to be delivered later by the observer of the European Union (EU).

I would like to thank you and your country, Mr. President, for taking the initiative to bring the comprehensive issue of regional cooperation and the links between security and development in Central Asia and Afghanistan to the attention of the Security Council. I also welcome the participation in today's meeting of such senior-level ministers from other Central Asian States, and we are very pleased to have young Afghan women, the future leaders of Afghanistan, here in the Chamber as well. I also want to compliment Ambassador Kairat Umarov for the excellent visit to Afghanistan this weekend that he and his team organized for the Security Council, and to thank the Government of Afghanistan for hosting us.

We welcome the Secretary-General's briefing this morning, as well as his steadfast commitment to preventive diplomacy and sustainable development, including in Central Asia.

We commend all of the countries of Central Asia for their efforts to invigorate and strengthen regional cooperation, including with Afghanistan. Such concrete steps as resolving long-standing border issues, easing border crossings, strengthening people-to-people contacts and lower barriers to trade are very welcome. Those actions serve as recognition of the fact that each country is better off if its neighbours also prosper.

Long-term peace and economic development for the individual countries of the region are intimately linked to regional security and development. The countries of Central Asia have seen progress on multiple fronts since independence 25 years ago, not least in poverty reduction and steady economic growth, and, as we see from Kazakhstan's membership on the Council, Central Asian States are playing an increasingly important role on the world stage.

Remaining challenges, many of which are common to the countries of the region, can be overcome through stronger regional cooperation. They include security threats and radicalization, managing shared water and energy resources and addressing the effects of climate change. Efforts are also needed to strengthen good governance, create jobs for a rapidly growing population, develop interconnectivity and reduce barriers to trade. Through regional cooperation those challenges can be overcome and transformed into mutually beneficial opportunities for the countries of the region, thereby creating a zone of peace, cooperation and prosperity that benefits all of the people of Central Asia as well as Afghanistan.

As we have heard many times in this Chamber in recent months, interconnected security challenges require joint and comprehensive approaches that integrate security, development and human rights. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides the blueprint for such an approach. We welcome the firm commitment of the Central Asian countries to the Sustainable Development Goals and their inclusion in their respective development strategies. As member of the European Union, we are contributing to a strong and durable relationship between the countries of the region and the European Union aimed at fostering prosperous, sustainable and stable socioeconomic development. That includes efforts to facilitate trade and increased connectivity, as well as to continue the EU's long-standing support for border management in Central Asia and Afghanistan.

The road to regional progress runs through a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan, something which is in everyone's interest. However, many of the challenges facing Afghanistan cannot be dealt with in isolation. Therefore, a clear commitment from regional actors and their constructive engagement is critical to a peaceful Afghanistan. Greater economic and political cooperation and integration are essential for the future of both that country and the wider region. We urge all stakeholders, especially Afghanistan's neighbours, to assume responsibility and work together towards a political settlement. Every country in the region stands to gain if there is peace in Afghanistan.

The only viable option to reach such a settlement is an inclusive Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process, which was confirmed once again during our visit last week. We welcome the Afghan Government's peace efforts, and we call on the Taliban to engage in a dialogue with the Government. We look forward to the upcoming meeting of the Kabul Process. The Security Council has an important responsibility to contribute and be responsive to creating an environment conducive to peace.

Respect for human rights is vital to achieving that peace. It is also essential that all parties in society be included. The economic empowerment and meaningful participation of women and girls in all political processes, including future peace efforts and negotiations, is a precondition for sustainable development. The Council's meeting with women's representatives last week reinforced those points.

The holding of inclusive, credible and transparent elections is a fundamental step in the consolidation of democracy in Afghanistan and is essential for future stability. It is imperative that the parliamentary and presidential elections take place as planned. We call on the electoral management bodies and on the Afghan Government to accelerate efforts to ensure that elections take place and that they be free and fair. We encourage them to take all the necessary steps to ensure women's participation, both as voters and as candidates.

As a steadfast partner to Afghanistan, we commit to doing our part through long-term engagement on State-building and peacebuilding in the country. With a view to contributing to sustainable, peaceful and economic development, our efforts include a $1 billion development-assistance commitment from 2015 to 2024, which includes humanitarian assistance, capacity-building, dialogue and mediation training for local female activists. We also contribute to NATO's Resolute Support Mission.

The United Nations should play an active role in supporting regional efforts in Central Asia and Afghanistan. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) provides important support for efforts to achieve lasting peace, a role that would be further enhanced by implementing the strategic review. Increased cooperation and coordination among the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia and UNAMA and other relevant United Nations agencies and regional organizations will further enhance the impact of United Nations support.

We commend the important work by the Regional Centre — represented in the Chamber today by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Natalia Gherman — and by UNAMA in promoting regional dialogue and conflict prevention. We would like to highlight in particular the laudable work regarding capacity-building in water diplomacy and modernizing the legal framework for managing natural resources. As pointed out by the Secretary-General, managing shared water resources that are fundamental to economic development can build trust and lead to greater investments. In turn, that is an important contributor to, and incentive for, sustaining peace in the region.

The Security-Council's visit to Afghanistan allowed us to take stock of progress and hear at first hand about the many challenges the country still faces. However, we also heard of the aspirations of all Afghans to build a better future. Becoming a connected and integrated part of the Central Asian region was central to that vision. All of the countries of the region, as well as Afghanistan's partners beyond the region, have a common interest in supporting these efforts.

I thank you very much for your leadership, Mr. President.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by thanking Kazakhstan for its initiative in convening this important meeting and, more generally, for placing Central Asia and Afghanistan at the heart of the Security Council's attention in the month of January. As the Council has just returned from Kabul, this meeting is an opportunity to reaffirm the importance that we collectively attach to the security

and development of that region of the world. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

France aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union. I shall confine myself to three main points.

My first point concerns the situation in Afghanistan. As I said, the Security Council has just visited Kabul, a first since 2010. On behalf of France, I would like to thank the Afghan authorities for their hospitality and to commend their determination as they pursue the democratic consolidation of the country.

The very high level of insecurity and violence in Afghanistan remains a major source of concern for France. Armed clashes and repeated terrorist attacks continue to seriously destabilize the entire country. In that regard, France shares the determination of the Afghan authorities and of our allies to combat terrorism, including its financing. In addition to the need to pursue ongoing reforms aimed at achieving governance that is more effective and better able to serve the population and strengthen the rule of law, France encourages Afghanistan to focus on two priorities in 2018.

The first priority is the conduct of free and transparent local and parliamentary elections. Progress has been made in that area, and preparations for the parliamentary elections have been initiated by the competent authorities, in particular the Government and the Independent Electoral Commission. France encourages the Afghan authorities to continue their efforts, with the support of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), to ensure an inclusive and credible electoral process. In that regard, the full participation of women in electoral processes, both as voters and as candidates, will be essential.

The second priority is to reinvigorate momentum towards an Afghan-led peace process. That requires relaunching the inter-Afghan dialogue, but also a sincere commitment and unambiguous support for peace from all of Afghanistan's neighbours. We call on everyone to make a renewed effort in that direction and make concrete commitments. France has noted the announcement of a new meeting of the Kabul Process at the end of February and hopes that the meeting will bring together existing initiatives under the authority of the Afghan Government.

Those are the two immediate priorities. But we must certainly not lose sight of the fragility of the humanitarian situation, particularly the case of refugees, as well as the very precarious situation of women and children, who remain, it should be recalled, the first victims of the conflict.

My second point pertains to cooperation between Afghanistan and Central Asia, which is not only necessary but also replete with great opportunities. France thanks Kazakhstan for taking the initiative of drafting a presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/2) that for the first time highlights the special ties linking Afghanistan and Central Asia, as well as the opportunities that they represent for the economic development and security of the region. Afghanistan and Central Asia in fact share many common challenges, all of which involve areas where stronger regional cooperation is needed.

In the area of security, I would mention preventing radicalization, in particular of young people and, more generally, combating terrorism and its financing. With regard to combating drug trafficking, which continues to fuel the Taliban insurgency, trafficking encourages corruption and poses a major public health risk to Afghanistan and the neighbouring countries. In that regard, the Paris Pact initiative, a partnership that includes Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries, remains a unique framework for exchange among all countries affected by narcotics produced in Afghanistan.

In the area of economic development, it is essential that Afghanistan be able to benefit from its geographical location in the heart of Asia. Its increasing involvement in multiple projects to increase connectivity between Afghanistan and Central Asia, as well as in various other forms of regional cooperation, must be encouraged.

Energy and transportation are two key sectors in that regard. As Afghanistan is one of the primary sufferers from global warming, which causes severe drought, it is fortunate that the region is endowed with great potential for developing renewable energy, including hydraulic, solar and wind resources. France encourages regional partners to invest in those energy sources and to green their economies. In Central Asia as elsewhere, it is important to continue to foster a comprehensive approach linking security and development goals as part of the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

My third, and last, point concerns the support of the international community, especially the United Nations, for Afghanistan and Central Asia. That support comes not only from UNAMA and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, but also from all United Nations agencies that are working to strengthen the stability and development of the region. I should like to reaffirm France's full support for the work of United Nations in the region and to encourage increased cooperation between UNAMA and the United Nations Centre for Preventive Diplomacy. Security Council consultations scheduled for next Monday, 22 January, concerning the activities of the Centre, and the upcoming renewal of UNAMA's mandate in March will provide opportunities to further elaborate on how the United Nations can continue to support Afghanistan and Central Asia.

For its part, France will continue to cooperate closely with Afghanistan and Central Asian countries on major international issues, beginning with combating terrorism, in a bilateral framework, as well as through the European Union, which today is a major partner for the region. France will also continue to support the modernization of those countries in all areas and to work resolutely to strengthen our links.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a privilege to have His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan preside over this meeting. Bolivia commends the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kazakhstan not only for having organized this debate, but also for its leadership in drafting today's presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/2) and for the trip to Kabul during its presidency. We take this opportunity to acknowledge and express our thanks for the hospitality of the people of Afghanistan during the Security Council's visit. We also acknowledge the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. The importance of this meeting is also illustrated by the presence of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, to whom I convey my deepest respect.

Bolivia is pleased by the significant progress made in preventive diplomacy as a result of strengthening relations between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the countries of Central Asia. We believe that such expressions of mutual trust are a clear sign of the determination of their authorities to continue the process that seeks to ensure peace and development for the Afghan people and other peoples of the region. We encourage the efforts that the Afghan Government has carried out to promote mechanisms and platforms for regional, interregional and international cooperation to bring about peace, stability and long-term sustainable development in that country and its neighbours in Central Asia, as set out in the presidential statement we adopted today.

We hope that the current fragile stability in Afghanistan will improve so that a stable environment can be established in order that future elections can be transparent and inclusive. We also believe that all work facilitating dialogue and cooperation between Afghanistan and Central Asia must continue, above all because such work fosters the achievement of the shared goals of economic and social development conducive to prosperity in the region. In that context, national, subregional and regional initiatives are very positive, as are actions to promote connectivity in trade policies, finance and infrastructure improvement, as will as trade among Afghanistan, Central Asian countries and other regions.

In that connection, it is important to acknowledge that the lack of territorial access to the sea, exacerbated by the distance to global markets and the high costs and risks associated with transit, imposes serious restrictions on export revenues, the inflow of private capital and the mobilization of domestic resources of landlocked developing countries, specifically those of Central Asia.

Bolivia expresses its satisfaction with the outcome of the seventh Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, held in Ashgaba on 14 and 15 November 2017. Both the host country and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, together with 67 other countries, had an opportunity to present important initiatives concerning energy and natural resources, connectivity, regional trade, private-sector development, cooperation among businesses and labour's support for the inclusion of women in economic activities in general.

In that connection, Bolivia believes that subregional, regional, interregional and international projects, platforms and programmes must be based on unequivocal respect for the sovereignty of the Afghan people over their natural resources. In a context in which the international community seeks to restore the

rightful place of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in international politics, the United Nations and the Security Council must stand as the guarantors of the sovereignty of that country.

Bolivia takes note of the meeting held in the Beijing on 27 December 2017, in which, under the auspices of the host country, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan reached important bilateral agreements through which both States demonstrated their willingness to improve their bilateral relations with a view to achieving harmonious coexistence and systematically resolving their concerns through dialogue and comprehensive consultations. We commend the important role of the Government of China, which is constructively promoting the rapprochement between the two countries through a trilateral dialogue and strengthening cooperation in the political, economic and security areas.

On the other hand, Bolivia is deeply concerned about the persistent presence of terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaida and Da'esh, in the subregion. We emphasize the importance of the participation of Afghanistan in regional Central Asia mechanisms in order to cooperate in combating terrorism. In that regard, we fully support the efforts under the joint plan of action for the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia. We believe that every effort to end the threat of terrorism in Afghanistan will be essential to ensuring definitive peace and security.

We also believe that it is necessary to combat illegal armed groups and those involved in the production, trafficking and illicit trade of drugs. The threat to stability and security in Afghanistan will continue as long as the illegal activities of those groups continue.

Finally, Bolivia is convinced that the only way to achieve sustainable peace and stability in Afghanistan is through a negotiated solution through constructive collaboration and diplomatic efforts in the interests of all Afghans and for their well-being. We therefore call upon all countries of the region to continue to strengthen their commitment with strong cooperation. We believe that there is no military solution to the situation in Afghanistan. We welcome any initiative at inclusive dialogue that respects the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Afghanistan. It is for that reason that we fully support the Kabul Process under the leadership of the Government of Afghanistan, which seeks to achieve peace, security and sustainability for the country in order to benefit all Afghans.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire thanks the presidency of Kazakhstan for convening this ministerial-level debate on the issue of peace, security and development in Central Asia and Afghanistan, which is a source of major concern to the Security Council and to all the States of Central Asia, and beyond. I would like to welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, who is presiding over our work today, and the other Ministers and Vice-Ministers and State Secretaries in attendance today.

I would also like to pay tribute to Afghanistan for allowing the Council to see at first-hand the situation on the ground in that great country. I take this opportunity to thank the Afghan Government for its welcome and hospitality.

I would also like to commend the Secretary-General on his informative briefing on today's agenda item.

The subject of today's meeting serves to highlight the close link between security and development in a regional context strongly dominated by major security concerns. That issue, which is of a global scale, is at the core of the Afghan crisis, which has lasted for 30 years and is markedly regional and global in nature. A global solution must therefore be put forward.

The situation in Afghanistan elicits serious concerns because of the complexity of security, economic and humanitarian challenges facing the country. The Security Council must therefore support the various national, regional and international initiatives to create the conditions necessary for peace and stability, which are essential for economic prosperity. In that context, it is important to understand the stakes and the challenges to the stabilization of Afghanistan in three aspects: political and security, economic, and regional and international.

In political and security terms, the conflict in Afghanistan is a breeding ground for terrorism in all its forms. The increasing level of terrorist activities carried out by the Taliban and the Afghan faction of the Islamic State in the country's various provinces contributes to the ongoing degradation of the security situation, with clear repercussions in the entire region. That situation of ongoing insecurity urgently calls for the strengthening of the international community's

capacity to curb the level of violence in the country. Against that backdrop, Côte d'Ivoire reminds all parties to the conflict of their responsibility to protect civilians during military operations and requests that additional measures be taken to reduce the number of civilian victims.

My country reaffirms the major role that the Security Council must play vis-à-vis the Afghan Government, with a view to reviving and taking ownership of the national reconciliation process. The Ivoirian Government therefore welcomes the adoption of the Afghan national strategy for peace and reconciliation presented by the High Peace Council, as well as the measures taken by the Government to implement the national action plan on peace, security and the promotion of women's rights.

Côte d'Ivoire also underscores the importance of the upcoming legislative and presidential elections and strongly encourages the Afghan authorities to do their utmost to ensure that the elections take place as scheduled in a peaceful environment and with the participation of all Afghans.

In addition to the points already I have mentioned, regional cooperation should contribute by pooling the means to combat, and glean information about, illicit trafficking, money laundering and the trafficking in weapons, with a view to eliminating those scourges.

At the economic level, Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the progress made by the Afghan Government in combating corruption and reducing its dependence on foreign aid, and encourages it to continue its efforts to combat drug trafficking, which is a source of terrorist financing. In the face of the growing phenomenon of drug trafficking, the international community must press for a comprehensive and coordinated approach to combat that scourge in all its forms.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the development of economic cooperation in Central Asia and urges Afghanistan and its neighbours to promote economic integration. In that regard, Afghanistan's geographic location between the energy-supplying countries of Central Asia and the energy-consuming countries of South Asia is an undeniable asset.

At the regional and international levels, the challenges to be met require a regional and global approach. In that regard, Côte d'Ivoire urges neighbouring countries to cooperate for the stabilization of Afghanistan and to promote regional cooperation and economic development. My country reaffirms its support for the Kabul Process, which provides a comprehensive framework for the Afghan Government and its regional partners to arrive at a political solution and lasting peace in the country. We therefore call on the States of Central Asia and on Afghanistan to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The Ivoirian Government calls for the participation of all Afghan parties, including the Taliban, in the next meeting of the political process, scheduled for February. We reaffirm the need to improve border control and information-sharing among competent national organizations in view of the issue of the return of foreign terrorist fighters, who now constitute a new threat to peace and security.

Côte d'Ivoire also welcomes the efforts of United Nations agencies in Central Asia and Afghanistan, which help the country regain peace and reinvigorate development, so as to contribute to the prosperity of Central Asia. My country is in favour of strengthened cooperation and coordination between the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, as well as the relevant regional organizations, so as to build the region's capacity to surmount the challenges hampering the restoration of peace, stability and development in this important and resource-rich part of our planet.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation commends Kazakhstan's initiative to convene this important debate on security, development and regional partnerships in Afghanistan and Central Asia. We welcome your presence, Mr. Minister, as well as that of the Ministers from the Central Asian region. We also thank the Secretary-General for his presentation this morning.

As has been noted, we have just returned this week from a visit to Afghanistan that has made it possible for us to better grasp the issues facing the country and their regional and global implications in an increasingly interdependent world. Here we would like to thank the people and the Government of Afghanistan for their hospitality and to reiterate to them our support in the achievement of sustainable peace in the country. Based on our national experience, we underscore the importance of linking security and development in the

framework of a broad and integrated approach, with the support of the international community, especially neighbouring countries.

Here I should like to make three points.

First, tackling the deep-rooted causes of the conflict in Afghanistan is a task that goes beyond the realm of peace and security. It involves investing in the sustainable development of a country with a very young population, with an average age of 18 years, and a poverty rate of approximately 39 per cent, a state of affairs that is exploited by extremist groups and various criminal organizations. In this respect, we support the conclusions of the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan on the need to concentrate efforts, in addition to maintaining internal stability, on achieving sustainable peace and reducing the external dependence of Afghanistan. International and regional cooperation can do a great deal in this respect by supporting the efforts of the Afghans themselves to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Investment in infrastructure projects and regional connectivity projects given priority by the national authorities could have the potential of preventing greater conflicts.

We believe that, in accordance with SDG 16, the rule of law and the consolidation of transparent, accountable and inclusive institutions are key elements in promoting a peaceful society. In that connection, we underscore the consensus of the members of the Council regarding the importance of complying with the electoral programme established for Afghanistan, including the election of an inclusive and representative parliament in 2018 and a new Government in 2019.

Secondly, it is vital to confront terrorism on the basis of a broad and comprehensive approach that, in addition to focusing on its root causes, takes account of its links with transnational organized crime and the global issue of drugs from a regional perspective. We are concerned that, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Afghanistan's production of opium and poppies has increased 87 per cent and 63 per cent, respectively, compared with the previous year, which channels additional resources to groups that promote violence.

It is imperative to confront this issue at its various stages, including the eradication of illicit crops, access to precursors, the social implications of consumption, and prevention programmes. International cooperation is required, including triangular and bilateral regional cooperation with neighbouring countries. Our experience in dealing with similar challenges has shown that alternative development programmes have been particularly effective for those segments of the population involved in drug production. We are prepared to share our experience with the Afghan authorities.

Thirdly, regional partnerships in their various forms can do a great deal to enhance the collective security, development and stability of their members.

I should like here briefly to refer to the experience of the Latin American region, which could be useful for other developing regions. With the Treaty of Tlatelolco, we were pioneers in declaring ourselves a zone free of nuclear weapons. It is also the first zone of peace in the world. Thanks to peace and various integration and partnership processes, in recent decades our region has registered significant rates of growth and a considerably reduced poverty rate.

Integration with neighbours and cross-border development have given the process added impetus, especially with the periodic bilateral meetings between the respective Heads of State, with the participation of ministers. We therefore welcome the fact that Afghanistan and the States of Central Asia are moving in a similar direction, with a view to transforming the area into a zone of peace, cooperation and prosperity, as reflected in the Treaty declaring Central Asia a nuclear-weapon-free zone. In addition, we believe that the trade integration and territorial connectivity promoted by the Afghan Government and the States of Central Asia will become pillars of stability and prosperity for the subregion, as was the case at the time of the Silk Road. As the old Eastern proverb says, alone you can go quickly, but together you can go farther.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We once again express appreciation to the Kazakh presidency for having convened this important debate on building regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model to link security and development.

Coming as it does on the heels of the recent Security Council mission to Afghanistan, this debate also affords us an opportunity to reflect on our visit. We are pleased to see you again, Mr. Minister, presiding over this meeting, which demonstrates the importance that the Kazakh presidency attaches to the situation in Afghanistan and Central Asia and to the nexus between security and development.

We thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing on the overall situation in the region.

The situation in Afghanistan was discussed last month during the quarterly debate on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), but what is different this time around is that this discussion is taking place after our very recent visit to Afghanistan, which we found very useful and productive.

We were indeed able to express solidarity with the people and the Government of Afghanistan and better appreciate the many complex peace and security challenges that the country continues to face, as well as the real potential it has for renewal and for contributing not only to regional security but also to development. Ensuring peace and stability, fighting terrorism and violent extremism, promoting dialogue and reconciliation, fostering good governance and the role of law, conducting parliamentary and district elections, and promoting inclusive growth and development are some of the most topical issues that we discussed with the Afghan leadership as well as a number of other important stakeholders.

It was very clear to us that Afghanistan continues to require comprehensive, sustained and coordinated support from the international community in all these areas. The fact that the country needs and deserves such support was lost on none of the Council members in the mission.

The discussions we have had on the situation in Afghanistan here in the Council cannot be said to have paid adequate attention to the regional dimension. What is different today is that we are considering the situation, perhaps for the first time, from the regional perspective. Indeed, the situation in Afghanistan cannot be seen in isolation from the peace, security and development of the Central Asian region.

There is no doubt that a peaceful and stable Afghanistan is vital for regional peace, security and stability in Central Asia, but that is not all. Afghanistan is also vital, as are the rest of the countries of Central Asia, to mutually advantageous development cooperation in this very important region.

In that context, we welcome today's adoption of a presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/2) that very much underscores that point, and we commend Kazakhstan for its facilitating role as penholder. Ethiopia attaches great importance to a regional approach to addressing threats to peace and security and promoting development cooperation to enhance the partnership between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations, in line with Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations. In that regard, we recognize the important role that the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia continues to play in helping countries of the region to address their shared challenges to peace, stability and development. We note the declaration adopted at the meeting of Central Asian foreign ministers held on 11 December 2016 in Ashgabat on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Regional Centre, at which the countries of the region agreed to enhance regional cooperation with the support of the Centre. Of course, we will have another opportunity to discuss that and other developments with regard to the Regional Centre next week.

We believe that it is critically important to maximize the efficiency and efficacy of the work of the United Nations in Afghanistan and Central Asia, including through enhanced coordination across the United Nations system. We hope that the Centre will enhance its cooperation and coordination with relevant United Nations bodies such as the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and other regional organizations, in order to strengthen the capacity of the countries of the region to overcome their challenges and foster greater cooperation among themselves for the sake of shared peace, stability and development.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan.

Mr. Kamilov (Uzbekistan): I would like to express our gratitude to the Republic of Kazakhstan for taking the initiative to hold these debates on Central Asia and Afghanistan at the Security Council. During his address to the General Assembly at its seventy-second session, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev of the Republic of Uzbekistan stressed that

> "[t]he stabilization of the situation in Afghanistan is an important precondition to ensure not only regional security, but global security as well" (*A/72/PV.5, p. 15*).

Based on that, we believe firmly that Afghanistan must remain at the centre of the global agenda and that our shared determination to promote peace should not weaken. The choice in favour of a peace process remains the only solution to the ongoing confrontation

for all intra-Afghan forces. We believe that we are seeing the creation of conditions conducive to a fully fledged launch of the process for a peaceful settlement of the situation in Afghanistan. Despite differences that remain with regard to some aspects of the process, the international community is becoming increasingly aware that there can be no alternative to holding peace talks between the Government of Afghanistan and the armed opposition, including the Taliban, in support of the process of integrating Afghanistan into trade, economic and infrastructural relations with its neighbours.

Obviously, peace in Afghanistan will bring benefits to all countries of the vast Eurasian continent, promoting the construction of roads and railways, laying of pipelines and development of regional and transregional trade in all directions. But what must be done to make that happen? There must first be a regional and broad international consensus on the basic issues of establishing peace and security in Afghanistan. Secondly, there must be national reconciliation through direct dialogue between the central Government and the armed opposition.

To that end, the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan are jointly initiating an international ministerial conference on Afghanistan and the peace process, security cooperation and regional connectivity in Tashkent in late March. Together with our partners in Afghanistan, we have made a detailed preliminary study of the issue and have come to the conclusion that the Tashkent meeting will represent a logical continuation of the second meeting of the Kabul Process, scheduled for late February, in order to consolidate the results achieved within the framework of the common international efforts at various levels. Ultimately, holding a high-level forum in Tashkent should demonstrate that the Afghan problem will not go down in modern history as an example of the helplessness and indifference of the world community in countering the challenges and threats common to all mankind.

As everyone here knows, Uzbekistan has experience in promoting the peace process in Afghanistan. In 1999, at our initiative, Tashkent hosted the meeting of the 6 plus 2 Contact Group at the level of high representatives of the ministries of foreign affairs of Afghanistan's neighbours, as well as of Russia and the United States, with the participation of representatives of the warring parties, including the Taliban movement. The Tashkent Declaration on Fundamental Principles for a Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict in Afghanistan was adopted following the talks.

Today Uzbekistan is consistently making a real contribution to the development of regional cooperation, especially in terms of engaging Afghanistan in the system of trade, economic and infrastructural relations with the States of Central Asia We see the main goals of the multilateral meeting in Tashkent as agreeing on the basic principles for a peaceful settlement in Afghanistan, formulating a mechanism for launching direct negotiations between the Government of Afghanistan and the armed opposition, and coordinating international joint actions to support that process. The results that we hope the the conference will achieve are the following.

First, we aim to adopt a final document, a Tashkent declaration, that will define the basic principles and conditions for a peaceful settlement and specify the obligations of the Afghan Government and the armed opposition, as well as those of the international community, in terms of launching the negotiation process and its support. Secondly, we will formulate a regional and international consensus on the promotion of a political settlement in Afghanistan. Thirdly, we will consolidate the central and coordinating role of the Afghan side in the process of the political settlement in Afghanistan. Fourthly, we will appeal to the participants in the Tashkent conference, and to all the armed opposition groups in Afghanistan, to stop the violence and take part in the negotiation process with the Afghan Government. Fifthly, the forum's participants will reaffirm their international obligations for combating international terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

To ensure the efficiency and productivity of the Tashkent conference, and taking into account the views of our Afghan partners, we would like to invite the Secretary-General, his Special Representative for Afghanistan, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the foreign ministers of China, Russia, the United States, India, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as well as the countries of Central Asia, to take part in the work of the conference. Uzbekistan would be grateful for the support of the members of the Security Council for this joint initiative with Afghanistan. We are confident that its implementation will demonstrate the determination of

the world community to ensure peace and sustainable development in that country.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan.

Mr. Abdyldayev (Kyrgyzstan) (*spoke in Russian*): I would first like to sincerely congratulate our brother country of Kazakhstan on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month, and to express my confidence that the Republic of Kazakhstan will make a worthy contribution to resolving the difficult challenges we are facing.

The role and importance of the United Nations in stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan and strengthening regional and international cooperation are invaluable. The subject of our meeting, which clearly encompasses the priority areas of our cooperation, our common challenges and the goals that we are working towards, is clear proof of that. We are all aware that if we are to achieve peace in Afghanistan, the desires of the Afghan people and their Government of National Unity are clearly not enough. We must, above all, reach a consensus among the permanent members of the Security Council.

Time has shown that the only way to ensure peace and stability in Afghanistan is by resolving its complex situation by exclusively political means, holding peace talks and achieving national reconciliation. However, we have to admit that there has been little tangible progress in that regard and certainly not as much as we expected. The bloodshed among the warring parties continues, as does their insistence on tactics demanding preconditions, making the start of peace talks almost impossible. Unfortunately, such a stalemate is liable to continue indefinitely, resulting in the further suffering and deaths of Afghan civilians, including women and children. In our view, therefore, the international community must come up with a realistic approach to the problem. In that regard, we support Uzbekistan's proposal to hold in an international conference in Tashkent in March on a peaceful settlement of the situation in Afghanistan, as Foreign Minister Kamilov of Uzbekistan just outlined. I am convinced that within the framework of that conference it will be possible to discuss new mechanisms for a peaceful settlement of the situation in Afghanistan in detail.

We share the view that the security and development of Afghanistan and the whole region are closely interrelated. Without security there can be no development and without development there can be no security. We believe that the countries of Central Asia are ready to engage actively in the process of building peace and stability in Afghanistan. We have comparative advantages and the potential for complementarity in our economies. However, there are problems related to inadequate transport infrastructure and limited access to external regions and markets. All of us, and all of the Central Asian countries above all, need to genuinely consolidate our cooperation and efforts on a basis of good-neighbourly relations in the interests of furthering the sustainable development of the countries of the region, including Afghanistan. We are also well aware that the development of major regional cooperation is chiefly a task for the Central Asian countries themselves.

I would like to note that since gaining independence, all the countries of Central Asia have made significant investments in improving railway and vehicle transport infrastructure. However, we also have to acknowledge that at present we have been taking an exclusively country-specific approach, and because of that, we are missing opportunities to effectively tackle our common problems by coordinating efforts at the regional level. We believe that with a regional approach, these projects would help to expand trade and have a positive impact on the social and economic situation in the region. In that regard, Kyrgyzstan has always supported the further consolidation of common efforts to develop coordinated approaches to resolving current issues of regional cooperation and development, assisting the peaceful development of Afghanistan and promoting economic integration at the regional and interregional level.

We commend the efforts made within the framework of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul process and the decisions taken following the seventh Ministerial Conference of Foreign Ministers, on the theme "Security and Economic Connectivity towards a Strengthened Heart of Asia Region", held in Baku at the end of 2017. Kyrgyzstan supports such initiatives aimed at establishing peace and achieving national reconciliation in Afghanistan, including strengthening confidence-building measures among the countries of the region, the joint implementation of various projects in Afghanistan, support for alternative ways of developing Afghanistan, and others.

There can be no question that the production and export of Afghan opium are two of the main issues plaguing Afghanistan and countries in the region.

As we see it, all possible support should be given to the initiative of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime promoting Afghanistan's alternative development among regional and international partners. In that context, my country fully supports the outcomes and decisions of the international conference held in Ashgabat on 16 and 17 November of last year. Along with measures to counter the illegal production and trafficking of drugs and combat terrorism and radicalism, it is extremely important to pursue joint efforts to integrate Afghanistan's economy with those of other countries in the region, including the States of Central Asia, by expanding cooperation and improving regional infrastructure, trade, investment, transit and transport projects. The seventh ministerial-level Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan was held in Ashgabat on 15 November 2017, with the theme of deepening connectivity and expanding trade through investment in infrastructure and improved mutual cooperation. Some very important regional projects were adopted as a result of the forum, but they can be successfully implemented only if the international community provides the necessary financial support.

Kyrgyzstan views the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan as an important economic partner in the region first and foremost, and we are making every effort to implement the Central Asia-South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade project as soon as possible. We firmly believe that its successful implementation will bring peace as well as light and energy to Afghanistan.

I would like to take this opportunity to briefly touch on Kyrgyzstan's initiatives related to Afghanistan. In the area of transport infrastructure, we have supported connecting the road and rail networks of the countries of the region with those of Afghanistan. On that front, we are participating in the implementation of a five-nation project for the construction of a China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway, and we are supporting the construction of a railway within the framework of the Economic Cooperation Organization along the Iran-Afghanistan-Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan-China route. We are building an alternative North-South road in Kyrgyzstan that will shorten the route connecting the highways of our northern areas with Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the field of subregional economic integration, Kyrgyzstan is promoting an initiative to establish a tripartite Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan agricultural-industrial consortium.

Where establishing peace and stability in Afghanistan is concerned, we believe that education will play a major role in restoring peace in the country. We are ready to consider educating Afghan students in our country's educational institutions with the financial support of foreign donors, and we have the potential, and the scientific and educational foundations, to make that happen. For example, more than 300 Afghan students are currently studying at various universities in Kyrgyzstan.

In conclusion, I would like to note that we support the commitment of all Central Asian countries to joint long-term cooperation with Afghanistan, and together with our international partners, we stand ready to cooperate fully to meet the challenges we are facing. Kyrgyzstan acknowledges the importance of coordinated action and a regional approach on the part of the international community in creating a zone of peace, cooperation and prosperity in Central Asia and Afghanistan. In that regard, we welcome the Secretary-General's initiative to use the tool of preventive diplomacy more effectively. We firmly believe that only through joint efforts can we make progress in solving Afghanistan's political and economic problems and ensuring security both in that country and all over the world.

Lastly, I wish our brother Afghan people peace and prosperity.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan.

Mr. Aslov (Tajikistan): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Kazakhstan on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the first time, and to thank the delegation for convening today's ministerial-level debate on the very important topic of building regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model to link security and development. I would also like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his very constructive briefing.

Central Asia and Afghanistan — once a foothold of global political and economic development, a hub of science, philosophy and intellectual life and a region that bridged civilizations from Asia to Europe via the Silk Road — have undergone significant changes throughout their long history.

Today, the worsening situation in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the threats coming from

its territory are of particular concern. The military-political situation in the bordering northern provinces of the country has a steady tendency towards complication. The expansion of international terrorism, the increase in extremism, transnational organized crime and drug trafficking and the exacerbation of environmental issues such as climate change and desertification are among the most pressing challenges faced by the region today. That current situation requires that the countries of the region take more robust action and make firm commitments by facilitating regional cooperation and partnerships based on a fair, effective and mutually beneficial economic system.

Tajikistan, which shares a long border with Afghanistan, bears the brunt of the security challenges and cannot remain indifferent to the current situation on that border. The activation of radical terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, the Taliban, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Ansarullah Movement and others in the northern districts of the country against the backdrop of the significant influx of narcotics, weapons and human resources is a matter of great concern to us.

Another threat that has a significant impact on the adoption of measures to ensure stability and security in Tajikistan, Central Asia and beyond, and which requires the joint effort of the international community, is illicit drug trafficking. Combating drug trafficking and drug abuse is part of the fight against organized crime, international terrorism and extremism, and the fight is carried out through implementation of foreign policy and through economic, legal, organizational, technical, operational, preventive and other measures. Coordinated activities of the Central Asian States in this sphere of common interests are carried out by their special drug-control coordinating agencies.

The Republic of Tajikistan, like any other State in the region around Afghanistan, bears the brunt of the fight against drug trafficking. Thanks to the measures taken by the Government of Tajikistan, as well as the support of donor countries and international organizations, including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, our country has made visible progress in that direction. I must note that the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan adopted a national strategy on combating illicit drug trafficking for 2013-2020 and a sectoral programme for the implementation of that strategy with a view to combating illicit trafficking in narcotics.

It is obvious that the fight against drug trafficking requires the joint efforts of countries at the regional and international levels, because no country alone can deal with this threat and its related crimes. Unfortunately, nowadays, despite the growing threat of drug trafficking, as evidenced by the record expansion of the opium poppy cultivation area in Afghanistan in 2017, not enough attention is paid to combating it. I consider it necessary to emphasize that all countries of the region should give priority to developing cooperation in combating illicit drug trafficking and developing concerted actions aimed at counteracting this evil.

The complex military and political situation in Afghanistan requires us not only to mobilize domestic resources, but also to improve the military and security infrastructure at the border and to provide the border guards with modern technologies and equipment so as to ensure efficient border management and prevent undesirable incidents at the border. At present, the law enforcement agencies of Tajikistan and Afghanistan are closely collaborating on those issues.

Tajikistan, as an advocate of the restoration of peace and security in Afghanistan through economic and social development, believes that regional cooperation is an important element for strengthening stability in that war-torn country and in the entire region. The joint promotion of projects in the fields of transport, communications, energy, investment, education, human resources, border management and other areas could become a basis for the rehabilitation and sustainable development of Afghanistan.

Being at the crossroads of Eurasia, Afghanistan could gain access to some of the fastest-growing markets in the world and serve as a transit hub for the expansion of trade between Europe, Asia and the Middle East. In that regard, I would like to highlight the importance of the timely implementation of regional transport, communications and energy projects, including the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade project — CASA-1000. To facilitate trade with Afghanistan, Tajikistan, with the assistance of the international community, has built five bridges on the Panj River and established two free economic zones on the border with Afghanistan, which significantly increased the volume of trade between the two countries.

One of the factors contributing to the maintenance of peace and stability in Afghanistan is the development of

the education system. Currently, more than 500 students study in Tajikistan universities. The Government of Tajikistan has decided to provide scholarships to approximately 1,000citizens of Afghanistan until 2025.

Tajikistan will continue its efforts to further strengthen cooperation with the Government of Afghanistan and international partners in the social, economic and security spheres with a view to supporting peace, stability and socioeconomic development in that neighbouring country. At the same time, we believe that an increase in targeted assistance by the international community, with the United Nations playing a central and coordinating role, remains vitally important. We are confident that the Central Asian countries need to further intensify economic cooperation with Afghanistan. Afghanistan's active involvement in regional projects is crucial.

Tajikistan's policy in the region is based on developing and strengthening good-neighbourly relations and expanding traditional practices of fraternal coexistence with all neighbouring countries. We have made them a priority in our international relations.

We believe that supporting Afghanistan's economic revival and social development is the best tool for maintaining its peace and stability and for ensuring security in the region. Therefore, we would like to call on the international community to increase its assistance in supporting socioeconomic development and improving the security situation in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, we note in particular the role of the regional organizations in ensuring peace and security in Afghanistan. Therefore, we call for strengthening cooperation between the relevant United Nations institutions and regional organizations, including the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Tajikistan stands ready for an open and constructive dialogue with all interested parties aimed at finding solutions to current security and stability challenges faced by Afghanistan and the region and at facilitating regional economic development.

Once again, Mr. President, please accept my sincere congratulations on your assumption of the Council presidency. I wish you and your team every success in fulfilling your noble commitments.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Karzai (Afghanistan): It is a great privilege to address the Security Council. I would like to begin by thanking you, Sir, and the Government of Kazakhstan for bringing us together for this important meeting on Afghanistan and Central Asia. We consider today's meeting an important initiative on an issue of strategic relevance for peace and stability in Afghanistan and our broader region. We also thank Secretary-General Guterres for his insightful briefing.

I am pleased to recognize the presence of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of our Central Asian neighbouring States and other partner countries. The high-level representation at this meeting signifies a personal commitment to the imperative of securing lasting peace and stability in my country, for which we are deeply grateful.

Today's meeting comes just days after the Security Council's visit to Afghanistan. The visit was an opportunity to discuss, broadly, a number of important issues, ranging from security, development and regional cooperation, to governance, human rights and democratization. We are confident that the outcome of the visit will contribute positively to strengthening the international community's engagement, cooperation and consensus on Afghanistan.

One issue highlighted in the visit concerns the topic on which we are meeting today: that Afghanistan's stability and development should not be seen in isolation from security and stability in the countries on our periphery and beyond. In that regard, the imperative of deepened cooperation between Afghanistan and Central Asian States on common challenges and promoting our shared prosperity has gained new impetus.

Afghanistan has always recognized the importance of our relations with all regional countries, especially those of Central Asia. Those bonds have endured on the basis of mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity, shared interests and common affinities of culture and history.

Despite those positive attributes, over recent years we have missed opportunities to expand the scope of our cooperation for common security, development and prosperity. Nevertheless, the past year has seen new dynamism take shape in our cooperation with Central Asian countries. That is based on the firm commitment of the Government of Afghanistan to increasing collaboration across multiple fields and sectors, such as regional connectivity, energy, trade and transit,

security cooperation, agriculture and in the cultural and educational spheres.

That new dynamic is manifested in a series of high-level visits to the Central Asian region in 2017 by the leadership of the Afghan Government. Last July, President Ghani visited Ashgabat and met with Turkmen President Gubanguly Berdimuhamedow. In August, Chief Executive Abdullah visited Astana and met with the Kazakh Prime Minister. And just last month, President Ghani paid a visit to Tashkent, where he held wide-ranging discussions with his Uzbek counterpart, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, and signed more than 20 different memorandums of understanding.

Those visits have helped set in motion a new era of engagement, interaction and cooperation on a common agenda for our security, economic development and integration, as well as strengthening people-to-people ties.

We all know that prosperity is not possible in the absence of security — a fundamental requirement in any society. Terrorism and violent extremism lie at the forefront of the interlinked challenges threatening the security and stability of Afghanistan and the region.

Our fight against terrorism is being conducted on behalf of the region and the world at large. We are making enormous sacrifices in that struggle in terms of human lives, ordinary civilians and our security forces alike. Despite all the challenges, our forces have made progress in pressing violent militants and terrorists, including the Taliban, the Haqanni Network, Al-Qaida, Da'esh and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, among others. In the past 10 months alone, our security forces have carried out more than 2,000 security operations nationwide, which have resulted in major losses among violent militants, including foreign terrorist fighters from the region and beyond who come to fight in Afghanistan.

We are pleased to note that the imperative of addressing the problem of regional terrorist sanctuaries and safe-havens is now recognized more than ever before. That issue was loudly communicated by a broad spectrum of Afghan society during the Council's visit to Afghanistan last week.

Experience has shown that terrorism impacts all of us, and the task of eliminating it lies beyond the capacity of any single country. It requires a comprehensive effort. In the context of our joint endeavours, we must prevent the radicalization of our youth, and identify and prevent the problem of cross-border terrorism and criminal and other illegal activities.

We must also work together to overcome the problem of illicit drugs. Progress in addressing that threat will be possible only through joint and collaborative efforts, focused on all aspects of the challenge, including production, demand, trafficking of chemical precursors and consumption.

We have engaged in comprehensive efforts to improve security and defeat terrorism. Beyond the scope of military efforts, we are working to ensure success in our peace efforts with elements of the armed opposition. On 28 February, we will convene the second meeting of the Kabul Process, where we will present to the international community our way forward for peace and combating terrorism. We count on the full support and endorsement of all Process partners, including from Central Asian States.

The Kabul Process gathering will precede the Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan in late March, which we will co-host with the Government of Uzbekistan. In that regard, we wish to highlight that all such initiatives should serve to reinforce Afghan-led and -owned peace efforts, under the Kabul Process, which remains the overarching framework.

On the margins of the Tashkent Conference, we also plan to hold the first meeting of the C5+Afghanistan. The C5+1 cooperation framework for Afghanistan and Central Asia is an important new regional initiative that will maintain sustained dialogue across a broad spectrum of areas. The United Nations will undoubtedly have a role to play in the Process.

Today's meeting also serves to underscore that the dangerous nexus facing Afghanistan and the region can and must be addressed only if existing efforts are integrated and the peace, security and development pillars are woven together. That imperative lies at the core of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, an Afghan-led initiative, which most Central Asian countries are part of. That will remain a key focus as we work to increase our cooperation with Central Asian countries through various platforms, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, in which we hope to gain full membership soon.

We also see additional potential for cooperation with the United Nations Regional Centre on Preventive

Diplomacy (UNRCCA) in multiple areas. In that context, we welcome the outcome of the imnisterial meeting on security and development convened in November by the Government of Uzbekistan, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the UNRCCA. Efforts under those formats will help us overcome issues of common concern. In that connection, we are of the view that any regional approach should harmonize and help to consolidate existing international efforts for security and stability in Afghanistan.

Another central theme in our discussion today concerns the crucial way in which the development agenda helps propel security. That is a key principle guiding international efforts to stabilize conflict situations worldwide. Afghanistan is clearly no exception.

Over the past three years, the Afghan Government has worked tirelessly to advance economic cooperation towards a new horizon. We have done so through the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference, which has seen unprecedented progress since its inception in 2005.

The past year has seen many notable achievements, but none as striking as the gains made in the area of regional economic cooperation. What we envisioned a few years ago is now truly taking shape and becoming a reality. Projects such as the Lapus Lazuli Corridor and Five Nations Railway, connecting China, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Iran, will have a profound impact on increasing connectivity and boosting the movement of goods, ideas and people.

We also made headway in 2017 in the implementation of other mega-projects, such as the electricity and natural gas initiatives — the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission Trade Project and the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project. Moreover, the Chabahar Port is now operational, thus increasing the flow and trade of goods. Over the course of the year, we will work to make further progress on those initiatives, the benefits of which are far-reaching and not only help boost trade and transit but also facilitate the exchange of new and innovative ideas for our common prosperity, in line with the related Sustainable Development Goals.

In conclusion, our gathering here today draws our attention to the unique opportunity that lies before us — an opportunity to shift the dynamic and transform the nexus of regional, threats such as instability, terrorism and other criminal activities, into a nexus of peace, security, economic growth and development for our prosperity. In that regard, we believe a new start towards regional engagement and convergence has begun. It is up to us to do our share and transform that new vision into reality. Afghanistan stands confident that our endeavour will succeed.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkmenistan.

Mrs. Ataeva (Turkmenistan) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan as he presides over the Security Council today and to express my certainty that under his able leadership the work of the Council will be crowned with success. We would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and for his involvement in the development of the Central Asian region.

The discussions initiated by Kazakhstan today are focused on issues related to sustainable peace, security and development in the Central Asian region and its closest neighbours, first and foremost Afghanistan. Turkmenistan takes an active part in joint international efforts to strengthen peace, security and cooperation in Central Asia. We have gained solid peacekeeping experience, which is also needed to properly address such crucial issues as assisting regional disarmament processes, resolving water and energy resource problems in a balanced manner, ensuring environmental well-being and countering the threatening dangers and challenges of the day.

We note the role of preventive diplomacy in preventing conflicts, dealing with their root causes, promoting an atmosphere of trust among countries and creating conditions conducive to effective interaction among States in the political, diplomatic, economic, social, environmental and other spheres. Turkmenistan attaches particular importance to the activities of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, which was established by a decision of the Security Council upon the initiative of the five Central Asian States. Over the 10 years of its existence, the Centre has provided the Governments of the countries of Central Asia a platform for dialogue on the most important regional issues, including the management of shared resources, combating such transnational threats as terrorism, violent extremism, organized crime, drug trafficking and human

trafficking and making joint efforts to help stabilize the situation in Afghanistan. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General and members of the Security Council and all of those who have spoken in favour of the comprehensive efforts of the Centre, which we expect will continue in future.

We fully agree that there is an inextricable link between security and development. Turkmenistan has therefore undertaken large-scale projects that meet the shared goals of bringing welfare and sustainable development to the people of the region. An important aspect of this constructive strategy is the strengthening of our traditional relations of friendship, good-neighbourliness and cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. We have been unwavering in our support of an exclusively peaceful, political and diplomatic resolution to the situation in that neighbouring country. Indeed, Turkmenistan is effectively supporting the socioeconomic and cultural regeneration of Afghanistan.

We have made constructive proposals aimed at developing fundamentally new mechanisms to stabilize the situation in the country and are taking consistent steps to rebuild its economy. Accordingly, Turkmenistan initiated the large-scale infrastructure projects mentioned here today, with Afghanistan's involvement. In the end, however, the problems of Afghanistan go far beyond the region and affect the prospects for sustainable development for the entire international community. Therefore, Turkmenistan has always adhered to its principled position on the need to develop a non-military, political and diplomatic approach to resolving the situation in that neighbouring State.

As an active participant in the efforts of the international community in this area, our country is convinced that peace and security are a crucial part of the prosperity of the region and its peoples, including Afghanistan. In that context, we view Turkmen-Afghan cooperation as an integral part of a broad international partnership. Turkmenistan's perspective is based on the desire to quickly involve our southern neighbour in regional integration, as well as seeing it join various projects, which, in turn, will make it possible for active peacebuilding to occur in Afghanistan.

The seventh Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, which took place in Ashgabat on 14 and 15 November 2017, is the logical next step for Turkmenistan in this area. It is also yet another step forward towards strengthening and broadening regional economic partnership. We support all regional and other initiatives, including Uzbekistan's initiative aimed at settling the situation in Afghanistan.

We call on Afghanistan and regional partners to maintain momentum in their efforts to strengthen regional dialogue and cooperation. We will continue to further support activities of cooperation and coordination of efforts between the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in order to strengthen their capacity to maintain peace and sustainable development in the region.

In conclusion, I would like to say to our brotherly country Kazakhstan that we wish it success in presiding over the Security Council this month.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Kazakhstan presidency for its timely initiative to convene today's debate. I believe the significantly high level of participation clearly demonstrates the importance that the international community attaches to these meetings. We fully share the views set forth in the presidency's concept note for today's debate (S/2018/7, annex) that building regional partnership and cooperation, not only in Afghanistan and Central Asia but in all regions of the world, serves as the most appropriate model to reinforce the inextricable nexus between security and development.

More than a decade after being invaded, Afghanistan, the region and the world are not any safer than they were before the invasion. That is a fact. But it has also been the case for all of the invasions that have occurred in our region. Afghanistan should become an exemplar for regional and international cooperation, rather than for competition. The world should regard the situation in Afghanistan as an opportunity to establish peace, security and stability through development and to find a win-win approach — not just for Afghanistan but for its neighbours, including the States of Central Asia and for the international community in general.

Investing in long-term cooperation with Afghanistan, enhancing economic interaction and

connectivity and expanding regional infrastructure, trade and investment and transit and transportation projects cannot only bring about security and political and economic benefits for Afghanistan, but also for all its partners in the region and the world. That partnership also helps reduce the breeding ground for terrorist and extremist groups.

Security and development are interrelated and mutually reinforcing factors that transcend the national boundaries of a single State in today's world, and often require a comprehensive and all-inclusive regional approach. Iran is indeed very eager to see a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan as its neighbour. Security and development in Afghanistan directly and indirectly affect security at our borders and in the region.

Our support for the Afghan National Unity Government is unrelenting. We welcome any achievement along the path leading towards an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process resulting in lasting and comprehensive peace in Afghanistan. It is in that context that Iran welcomed, and continues to participate in, the Kabul Process and any other similar processes to help foster peace and security in Afghanistan. Strengthening our regional cooperation with Afghanistan is a priority and a major pathway to consolidating peace, stability and economic development in our neighbouring country. In that regard, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has spared no effort to promote its brotherly relations with the Afghan people. Over a decade's time, Iran has funded altogether more than 300 development projects, including reconstruction and building infrastructure for a total of $500 million, including major projects such as the Chabahar port facilities, established through a trilateral agreement made by Iran, India and Afghanistan, and the Khaf-Herat railway.

We have also funded and implemented many projects in the area of technology transfers, know-how and training with Afghan work forces in various area to help them reconstruct their own country. Those projects have the capacity to change regional economic perspectives and can help foster prosperity and stability in Afghanistan.

In addition to those projects, for more than three decades Iran has hosted millions of Afghan refugees. We continue to share our much-needed subsidized goods and services, including basic commodities, public health and public education. This year alone, our schools are providing education to nearly 400,000 undocumented Afghan students.

The challenges facing Afghanistan are complex and interconnected. The nexus linking security and development is deep-rooted; it cannot be addressed solely through military build-up and strategies. For example, the 87 per cent increase in opium production is not only a clear indication of underdevelopment, low-income and lack of economic opportunities, it is also alarming when we note the fact that narcotics provide a major source of income for terrorist groups. Furthermore, poverty provides immense and abundant opportunities for recruitment by terrorist groups and drug trafficking networks. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan is playing a crucial role at this critical moment for Afghanistan. It definitely needs more support from the international community.

Let me conclude by expressing my best wishes to the fraternal people and the Government of Afghanistan and to reassure them of Iran's full support in their endeavour to bring about peace and prosperity in their country.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I thank Kazakhstan for organizing this important and timely debate.

Belgium aligns itself with the statement to be made on behalf of the European Union. In my national capacity, and as a member of the Group of Friends of Afghanistan, I shall focus today on three areas, namely, economic development, counter-terrorism and cooperation between the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA).

First, concerning economic development, as we all know, among other things, lasting peace depends upon a country's economic development, which itself is closely linked to the level and efforts made in the area of regional cooperation. Afghanistan and Central Asia are situated at a historical crossroads linking the East and the West. It is our belief that Afghanistan and Central Asia have everything to gain from deeper economic cooperation, better market integration and increased interconnectivity. That integration should be open to a broader area, extending from South and East

Asia to the Middle East and all the way to Europe so that Central Asia can once again serve as such a crossroads.

Secondly, concerning counter-terrorism, regional cooperation is also necessary for combating smuggling, transnational crime and the recruitment by, and the financing of, terrorist organization networks. That is especially important given that the military advances against Da'esh in Iraq and Syria are now forcing us to focus upon the return of foreign terrorist fighters from those areas. We share that serious concern with Central Asia and with Afghanistan, and we advocate for a strong and active role played by the United Nations in providing cooperation and support in that area. In addition to its financial support, Belgium is also ready to contribute to that work by sharing our experience and best practices. Furthermore, United Nations agencies must continue to support Central Asia through the joint plan of action for the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. We believe that adequate attention must be paid to preventing violent extremism, especially among young people, as that accounts for one of the root causes of terrorism. The Office of Counter-Terrorism, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and UNRCCA must continue to play an important role in that area.

Thirdly, concerning the United Nations contribution, that brings me to the matter of cooperation between UNAMA and UNRCCA. Providing cooperation and better coordination on the ground is particularly urgent in the context of combating drug trafficking and trafficking in human beings. As evidenced by the substantial number of participants from the region in today's debate, I welcome the commitment of Central Asian countries to stabilizing and developing Afghanistan.

In conclusion, I would be remiss were I not to mention the recent visit by the Security Council to Afghanistan. I commend that visit, which sends a message of support from the international community to the Afghan Government. Belgium congratulates the Government for its commitment and renewed energy conducive to peace talks — something that Council members have been able to see for themselves. Peace talks must lead to a lasting solution to the conflict, but can succeed only if they are supported by all the parties in the region and by the international community as a whole. The success of those talks would give strong impetus to lasting stabilization in the country, and, beyond that, to the economic development of Afghanistan, its immediate neighbours and the countries of Central Asia.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): First of all, let me convey the condolences of the Government and the people of Germany for the tragic bus accident involving many victims from Uzbekistan.

I thank you, Sir, for convening today's debate and for allowing Germany to speak. I would like to commend the Kazakh presidency for including this topic on the agenda of the Security Council. I recall that this is Kazakhstan's third initiative in this regard: an Arria Formula meeting, which Afghanistan and Germany co-hosted, was held last November; a trip to Kabul by the Council took place last week, whose outcome was very interesting; and today we hold a ministerial debate, in which a number of high-ranking Ministers are participating. I therefore again congratulate the Kazakh presidency for having put regional partnership with Afghanistan on the agenda.

I would like to underscore what the majority of speakers have stated — when we consider today's debate, a common thread emerges with regard to support for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and political process, which is very important. As my French colleague stated earlier, elections are the main priority in the political process. They must be Afghan-owned, take place as scheduled and be legitimate so that all Afghans can participate. The concept of an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process will not work without international support. In that regard, if I may, Mr. President, I would like to commend you on the regional cooperation that Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries have promoted. I believe that such cooperation is very encouraging. It is clear that it fully embraces Afghanistan as part of the C5+1. According to the Central Asian countries, they provide a great deal of support to Afghanistan. They assist many Afghan students by offering scholarships for various initiatives, such as for the Tashkent Conference, as I learned today for the first time. Support was provided, but it was Afghan-led.

Germany has always supported the regional approach in the European Union (EU), such as when we held the presidency in 2007. We launched an EU and Central Asia cooperation agreement, whose renewal we are now supporting and which we expect in 2019.

However, I do not want to pre-empt the statement of the observer of the European Union, with which Germany, as I said, fully aligns itself.

I would like to make one last point about international support and the United Nations. I listened intently to the statement made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan with regard to the important role played by the United Nations. I fully agree with the fact that there should be greater coordination among the various United Nations activities. That also reflects the proposals of the Secretary-General with regard to stronger United Nations cohesion abroad. I would also like to underscore the importance of the Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia, whose head is in attendance today. I agree with the remarks made by the representative of Ethiopia about the Regional Centre, which Germany fully supports.

When individual countries and regions state that they support Afghanistan, it is very important that they adopt a coherent approach that is based on the understanding of the links among the humanitarian, peace and development dimensions. I found it very encouraging that almost everyone at today's meeting stated that without security there can be no development. That notion was explained best by our Swedish colleague when he highlighted the important link between development and security. I agree with his statement. I thought that his remarks were encouraging, and I believe everyone supports them. The Russian Foreign Minister also mentioned the importance of sustained economic and social development in Afghanistan.

The Secretary-General highlighted the scope of such development. I would like to express my support for water cooperation in the region, while taking into consideration climate change and temperature rise. Water, energy and infrastructure — with its various initiatives — are all key. Economic development and trade are key to eliminating and providing an alternative to opium production, which leads to devastating consequences.

Germany has supported Afghanistan for many years. Our civilian support in recent years, including the past year, totalled more than €400 million. Afghanistan is one of our main economic partners and will remain so. However, it is also true that without security it is likely that there will be no development. From the start, Germany has supported NATO as the second largest troop-contributing country. We are focusing on the north of Afghanistan. We try to stabilize it and help our Afghan friends by providing training, advice and assistance to the Afghan security forces. We also chair the International Contact Group on Afghanistan and strive to enhance international cohesion with regard to peace and stability in the region.

At the same time, we know that there is no military solution to the Afghan crisis. Therefore, we fully support the intra-Afghan peace process, which must be Afghan-led. We support the meeting in Kabul on 28 February. However, with regard to an agreement — and we all hope for a political agreement to be reached — I agree with the remarks made by both the Deputy Secretary of State of the United States and the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, who stated that the agreement must not be at the expense of progress made thus far.

We heard very impressive statistics with regard to the number of girls attending school and the role of women. I think that it is very encouraging that our colleagues brought along some Afghan women to prove that progress has been made. It must be maintained.

Following today's meeting, I am totally convinced that Kazakhstan will ensure that the issue of regional partnership in Afghanistan will remain on the Council's agenda. Germany will always support it.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Akbaruddin (India): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing today's debate on Afghanistan and for choosing the subject "Building regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model to link security and development". We also thank the Secretary-General for sharing his views on a subject that is so closely linked to the stability of our region.

Afghanistan is the true heart of Asia and a linchpin to the economy of the region. As pointed out by several other speakers, security and development are closely linked, and that link must drive the policies and actions of all stakeholders at the conceptual and operational levels. However, in the case of Afghanistan, that link is skewed in one direction only — the impact of the deteriorating security environment on development.

That the security situation weighs adversely on Afghanistan is reflected in the latest World Bank *Development Update*. From 2003 to 2012, Afghanistan recorded a 9.6 per cent annual economic growth rate.

Last year, the rate was 2.6 per cent, which is better than the 2.2 per cent recorded in 2016, which in turn was better than the lower growth rate in 2014-2015. Next year, the projections are for growth to edge up to 3.2 per cent, assuming the security situation holds.

Many of us who are engaged in development and infrastructure projects in Afghanistan are acutely aware of the disproportionate amount of resources that are diverted to protecting the projects and infrastructure that is created, rather than implementing more projects in the country. While we commonly see attacks on dams, schools, parliament buildings and electric-power centres, what is most debilitating for the development of the country are the attacks on its people. The attacks on the young in Afghan schools, women in Afghan hospitals and the hopeful in Afghan mosques all are a stark reminder of how the very spirit of Afghanistan's future is being systematically threatened and scarred by those who believe that violence is the only way to achieve their goals.

The people of Central and South Asia have been connected through centuries. We have shared commonalities of art and culture, ideas and knowledge, as well as language and traditions. These connections, while now tarnished by decades of war and instability in the region, remain resilient even in the face of the forces of decay and division. Today, they are in need of rejuvenation and reconnection. To reconnect and revive the commonalities of the region, we need to confront these forces of decay and destruction.

It is our belief that the starting point of our journey to realize the full spectrum of connectivity between Central and South Asia, as articulated by our Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi — from culture to commerce; from traditions to technology; from investments to information technology; from services to strategy; and from people to politics — begins in Afghanistan.

In line with our vision of a connected region, we established in 2017 air corridors between India and Afghanistan to overfly the obstacles imposed by geography and mindsets that hurt the welfare of the Afghan people. We have also cooperated with Iran and Afghanistan to facilitate the flow of goods between our countries through the Chabahar port. This also opens opportunities for surface connectivity between India and the Central Asian region.

Recent visits to India by President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah in the past three months have provided impetus to the wide-ranging new development partnership that both our countries launched in September 2017. This covers diverse areas, including education, health, agriculture, infrastructure, renewable energy, drinking-water supply and human-resource development. Our people-to-people contacts extend from colleges and cricket fields to trade and investment.

For thousands of years, Afghanistan was situated at the heart of Asia. The cities of Kabul, Balkh, Herat, Kandahar and Bamiyan constituted some of the key way stations on the crossroads of history through which trade, culture, religions, syncretic philosophies and technologies freely flowed, to reach every corner of Eurasia. We therefore support the desire of the Afghan Government and people, as expressed by President Ghani, to regain their country's former status as the centre of the Asian crossroads. Afghanistan has always been at the heart of networks: a roundabout, a place of meetings, civilizations, religions, cultures and, of course, armies and traders as well as pilgrims, and, hopefully, will once again become the true heart of our region's prosperity.

It is our vision that Afghanistan will regain its place, and we remain committed to working closely with our regional and international partners to bring peace, security, stability and prosperity to Afghanistan. It is with this in mind that our Prime Minister, during his visit to Afghanistan on 24 December 2015, to inaugurate the Parliament building, stopped over in Lahore, Pakistan. Unfortunately, the visit was followed by a heinous and barbaric terrorist attack on the Pathankot airbase on 1 January 2016, perpetrated and planned by the very same mindsets that attack the spirit of Afghanistan every day. These mindsets differentiate between good and bad terrorists and refuse to see reason in peace. People with these mindsets are reluctant to join hands in moving the region forward to build a shared future for our people and our youth. These mindsets need to change.

We honour the supreme sacrifices made by the Afghan Defence and Security Forces for the cause of humanity and in their efforts at fighting terrorism emanating from beyond Afghanistan's borders. Terrorism and externally induced instability pose the gravest threat to Afghanistan's peace, stability and

prosperity, and the growing arc of terrorist violence endangers our entire region.

There is a common Afghan saying that roughly translates as, "If water is muddied downstream, do not waste your time filtering it; better to go upstream and clean it".

As such, support for voices of peace in Afghanistan alone is not enough. We must focus on addressing the challenges posed by cross-border terrorism emanating from safe havens and sanctuaries to our region, especially to Afghanistan. If we do so, the decay that has been inflicted on Afghanistan can be made reversible.

The Council has returned after a successful visit to Afghanistan. It was a visit during which, in the many interactions they had with a cross-section of Afghan interlocutors, Council members must certainly have come across the common Afghan saying, "A sign is enough for the wise to understand".

We hope that the Council will act with wisdom to promote the vision of a shared and connected future for the people of the region by addressing the security conundrum that Afghanistan faces.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Begeç (Turkey): At the outset, allow me to thank Kazakhstan for having organized this important debate. We appreciate the close attention paid to the situation in Afghanistan during Kazakhstan's presidency of the Security Council.

The Council's recent mission to Kabul was a solid manifestation of its resolve in supporting the Government and the people of Afghanistan in their efforts to rebuild their country. We thank Kazakhstan for its leadership in taking this mission forward.

We believe that Afghanistan, located in the Heart of Asia, is inseparable from Central Asia. The security, stability and prosperity of Afghanistan is of key importance for that of Central Asia and other neighbouring regions. This is also essential for the maintenance of global peace and security.

Addressing the challenges that Afghanistan continues to face in the fight against terrorism, radicalism, violent extremism, illegal narcotics production and trafficking is also crucial for the countries of Central Asia and beyond. That is why regional actors as well as the wider international community have important responsibilities and roles in assisting Afghanistan to overcome these challenges.

It is not realistic to think of long-lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan without the support of neighbouring and regional countries. Therefore, the continued constructive engagement of the international community with regional actors could contribute to enabling an atmosphere conducive to genuine cooperation.

Security and development in Afghanistan are closely interlinked. There can be no development without security, and security cannot be sustained without development. There is a need to enhance regional ownership and cooperation in order to achieve progress on both fronts. We therefore welcome the recent efforts and initiatives to strengthen the interaction and cooperation between Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries. We see such initiatives as complimentary to the wider efforts to enhance Afghanistan's focused regional cooperation.

Our vision for Afghanistan is a peaceful, secure and stable country that enjoys good and cooperative relations with its neighbours, while being at the centre of major regional cooperation projects in infrastructure, trade and transportation. With that understanding, we believe that the recent signing, in Ashgabat, of the Lapis Lazuli Transit, Trade and Transport Route agreement will also solidify the basis of regional cooperation by bolstering trade.

Turkey will continue to contribute to the regional cooperation efforts, including through the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, which we are pleased to co-chair for the second time this year. Increasing cooperation in the Heart of Asia will not only benefit Afghanistan, it will also constitute a useful instrument for the region as a whole to realize its full potential in economic development, investments and trade.

We would also like to emphasize that an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process is central to achieving long-lasting peace in the country. Enhanced dialogue and cooperation among regional actors is necessary for the peace and reconciliation efforts to yield concrete results. Therefore, we look forward to the successful holding of the forthcoming second meeting of the Kabul Process. Turkey remains ready to contribute to the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation efforts to the best of its ability.

In conclusion, we would like to underline that the Afghan people deserve a better future. The continued commitment and support of countries of the region, including those in Central Asia, as well as the wider international community, will be critical in assisting the Afghan Government and people along that path. In that regard, we are pleased to see minister-level participation, including from Central Asian countries, in our meeting today. Turkey remains ready to assist all efforts in that regard as long as our help is needed.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): On behalf of the Pakistan delegation, I would like to congratulate Kazakhstan on assuming the presidency of the Security Council and for organizing this very important debate in a very timely way.

It is almost a truism to say there can be no development without peace and no peace without development. The situation in Afghanistan starkly illustrates how the absence of security prevents economic development and, in turn, how a lack of economic development fuels and breeds conflict and insecurity. Despite the large presence of foreign military forces and the huge outlays of extended assistance, security has deteriorated and economic growth has been anaemic in Afghanistan. Yet there is great promise in Afghanistan. It is a strategically located country, which can act as a bridge between its multiple neighbours, between South and Central Asia and between West and East Asia.

Muhammad Iqbal, the poet who first conceived of Pakistan as an independent State, also described Afghanistan as the heart of Asia. Presciently, the poet of the East declared, over a century ago, that if there is instability in Afghanistan, Asia will be unstable; while peace in Afghanistan will bring peace and prosperity to all of Asia. The people of Afghanistan have paid a heavy price for over four decades of foreign invasions and bloody civil wars. And so have the people of Pakistan — Afghanistan's closest neighbour. Indeed, the entire region has been buffeted by the war, turmoil, terrorism, drugs and instability radiating from Afghanistan.

We in Pakistan recognize the imposing challenges that face Afghanistan in realizing economic and social development. We commend the security and economic reforms envisaged by the Afghan Government. Strengthening bilateral relations is a priority for my Government. We have taken a number of initiatives to support Afghanistan's economic development. We have done all we can to improve the transit of Afghan trade through our ports. We look forward to the day when transit trade from Central Asia can flow through Afghanistan and Pakistan, which is the shortest route to the Arabian Sea. Fifty thousand Afghan students have studied in my country's universities, and we also offer 3,000 scholarships to our Afghan brothers and sisters. Pakistan is also committed to several projects — the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project and the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project — which will contribute to the economic integration of the entire region. Pakistan has committed $1 billion over the past decade to various infrastructure, road network and development projects in Afghanistan.

However, none of our efforts to support Afghanistan's economic development can be successful without the restoration of peace. Sadly, civil war continues in Afghanistan. Over 40 per cent of the country is under insurgent control, contested or ungoverned. Illicit drug trafficking provides insurgent groups with a steady financial income estimated at almost $400 million a year. Indeed, with its safe havens inside the country and income from the narcotics trade, the insurgency does not really need any outside assistance or support centres to sustain itself.

Afghanistan and its partners, especially the United States, therefore need to address those challenges inside Afghanistan, rather than shift the onus of ending the conflict onto others. Those who imagine sanctuaries outside really need a reality check. And those who speak of changing mindsets need to look within at their own record of subversion against my country, as our capture of an Indian spy has amply demonstrated and proved beyond any shadow of doubt.

The international community has found time and again that sustainable peace is achievable only through a negotiated end to war. The presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/2) the Council adopted this morning again reiterates that firm consensus of the global community. After 17 years of war, it is more than evident that neither the Afghan Government and its military partners nor the Afghan Taliban are in a position to impose a military solution on each other.

The continuing resort to military force and escalation of the conflict without an accompanying

political and diplomatic strategy will not yield a result different from what we have seen in the past decade and a half. It will produce more violence and suffering for the Afghan people. It will not yield a political solution. And it is not enough to pay lip service to a negotiated settlement and then do little other than exercise and execute a strategy of force and coercion under the delusion that it might work.

We also call on the Taliban to abandon the path of violence and to join the talks. Both sides need to show the determination and the commitment to follow a path of a negotiated settlement.

There is in fact an urgent need to pursue a credible and sustained peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan aimed at finding a negotiated peace. Pakistan's participation in all regional and international forums on peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan is a reflection of my country's commitment and unflinching support to an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process.

Apart from Afghanistan, it is Pakistan that has the most to gain from peace in Afghanistan. We continue to host the largest protracted presence of refugees anywhere in the world. Approximately 3 million refugees still reside in my country. My country has also been a major victim of terrorism and violence emanating from Afghanistan's strife and wars. We have fought and are defeating terrorism within Pakistan. Pakistan's counter-terrorism campaign — the largest in the world, with a 200,000-strong deployed military force — has turned the tide of terrorism in Pakistan.

But our ability to totally eliminate terrorist acts in Pakistan depends upon the effective control over our long border with Afghanistan. We have enforced stringent border management measures on our side of the border. We look forward to Afghanistan matching what we have done on their side of the border. We are also committed to not allow Pakistan's soil to be used for attacks against any country.

In conclusion, the path to peace and development in Afghanistan is arduous, but achievable. While the international community, including Pakistan and Afghanistan's other neighbours and the Central Asian States, can help in promoting a peace process and assist the country with its development agenda, ultimately the principal responsibility for achieving peace rests on the Afghans themselves. As far as my country is concerned, we stand ready and committed to extend our full cooperation bilaterally and within the various regional frameworks to promote peace and security in Afghanistan.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Joanne Adamson, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Ms. Adamson: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

I would like to thank the Kazakh presidency of the Security Council, and in particular its Minister for Foreign Affairs, for convening this debate, which provides a good opportunity to share views, best practices and experiences on a very topical subject, as well as to take stock of initiatives, both planed and ongoing, that support international peace through regional cooperation.

The EU and Central Asia have a common interest in Afghanistan's security and prosperity. International and regional support to an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned inclusive peace process is essential. In that respect, the contribution of the countries of Central Asia, as direct neighbours, is crucial for the success of any meaningful peaceful settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan. In our view, any stabilization strategy requires a solid regional approach. The EU stands ready to support the Afghan stakeholders themselves in providing a conducive environment for an intra-Afghan peace process. The EU supports the Afghan Kabul Process on Peace and Security, of which the next meeting is planned for 28 February. From that meeting, the EU would expect tangible progress on the way forward towards a peaceful settlement with the Taliban.

Reinforced regional cooperation is key to lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region. Such cooperation is indispensable for sustainable development. Afghanistan continues to engage with its neighbours through international forums, such as the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan. The EU strongly supports such regional forums to facilitate economic and political cooperation among all regional stakeholders.

We believe that the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia in Ashgabat has an important role to play in supporting countries in the region, including Afghanistan, in dealing with the common challenges related to security and development. In that context, connectivity, which is also part of the EU's global strategy, is key to success. The EU supports efforts by Central Asian countries to facilitate trade and provide energy resources to Afghanistan. Afghanistan's own infrastructure and connectivity programme aims to develop transit and connectivity.

The Lapis Lazuli Corridor railway, between Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey; the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline; the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project; and the regional water management and cross-border water management of the Kunar River basin are all important connectivity projects for Afghanistan. They will have an important long-term positive impact and are also in the interest of the international community. Indeed, better connectivity for Afghanistan and its citizens could lead to improved economic development and infrastructure. That will eventually allow for a reduction of both international development aid to the country and the influx of migrants and refugees to the region and beyond. Politically, it could help to bring regional partners to engage positively in Afghanistan and to contribute to a more stable and peaceful Afghanistan.

The EU remains determined to counter all forms of terrorism, including the growing threat posed by affiliates of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), as well as violent extremism, as fundamental threats to regional and international peace and stability. In that regard, in 2017, the EU decided to provide more support to Central Asia in the area of counter-terrorism. A new regional project is being launched on conflict-sensitive reporting to support local media in positive action in favour of peace and security and against radicalization attempts and narratives. Similarly, there is a need to enhance data protection and internet governance. Terrorists use information and communication technologies to recruit, finance, intimidate, and disseminate their messages. A crucial element in counter-terrorism policies is finding a sustainable balance between freedom and security in order to prevent the re-emergence of ISIL affiliates. That is also important in Central Asia and Afghanistan. The EU is committed to achieving both. However, the debate on security versus freedom remains a work in progress.

Threats from the nexus between terrorism and organized crime, including drug trafficking used for the financing of terrorism affecting all countries of the region, can be confronted only through increased political, economic and security cooperation. The EU is supporting the regional programme of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime that covers Afghanistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The EU also supports Central Asian partners in the fight against drugs through a regional Central Asia drug action programme and a transregional programme, namely, the EU Action against Drugs and Organised Crime.

Finally, the EU has been supporting regional cooperation at the level of border guards in order to help Afghanistan to foster regional cooperation and facilitate secure trade links with its neighbours, especially Central Asia. In that context, the EU Border Management Northern Afghanistan project assists Afghan border police in better securing the country's northern border in order to improve cross-border cooperation, reduce crime and improve legal trade, travel and commerce along Afghanistan's border with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, complementing similar programmes in Central Asia.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important debate immediately following the Security Council mission to Afghanistan, which was realized under Kazakhstan's strong initiative. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

The Secretary-General's visit to Kabul in June 2017 and the strategic review were both important milestones in developing the relationship between Afghanistan and the United Nations. We appreciate the excellent efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in fulfilling its existing mandate. However, the emphasis on peace and conflict, which the review encourages, will require some changes in UNAMA's configuration. The discussion about the mandate renewal will be held mainly by Council members, but Japan hopes that the voices of various stakeholders with great interest in today's discussion will also be considered.

Japan has been engaged in efforts to resolve various problems facing Afghanistan and Central Asia. We are striving to achieve sustainable peace and development in that region. It is regrettable that the security situation in Afghanistan is still volatile, despite enormous efforts by the Afghan Government and assistance from the international community, and that it poses a threat to Central Asia. Japan's position that only genuine progress on an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process will be able to provide significant security improvements remains unchanged. Japan calls on Afghanistan and other regional stakeholders to be united in seeking tangible outcomes in the second round of the Kabul Process, to take place in February.

In our efforts to address the security-development nexus in Afghanistan and Central Asia, Japan has been paying particular attention to the development of human resources. We have repeatedly emphasized our belief that Afghanistan's potential and its human resources can lay the foundation for economic development and self-reliance and enhance the capability of future Government operations. In September 2017, Afghanistan celebrated the launch of work on the new Kabul City, where we expect more than 250,000 residential units to be built over the next 30 years. It was our pleasure to have supported the capacity-building of the many experts who conducted the research and planning for that important project.

The main objective of long-term Japan-United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime coordination is to establish border liaison offices on drugs and crime and train drug enforcement agents. We believe that trainees from Central Asia and Afghanistan will play key roles in preventing and countering violent extremism in the region. Japan will continue those initiatives.

I believe that the stakeholders participating in today's debate are united in supporting Afghanistan because a stable and prosperous Afghanistan is not only of interest to the region, but also to the entire international community. Our willingness to extend assistance to a self-reliant Afghanistan is underpinned by international agreements, including relevant Security Council resolutions and the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework. As we fulfil our commitments, we look forward to seeing tangible outcomes from Afghanistan. We must see progress in the peace process in 2018, as well as in the parliamentary and district council elections. Japan will continue to do its part for a better future for Afghanistan and its people.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Biagini (Italy): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Kazakhstan on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January, and thank it for convening this very timely and important meeting. We also welcome the adoption of the presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/2) on this occasion.

We align ourselves with the statement just delivered by the observer of the European Union.

Regional partnerships play a primary role in addressing the security and development challenges facing Afghanistan. The countries and the peoples of Central Asia share a common history of rich and interdependent relations in the political, cultural and economic domains, with Afghanistan at its core — the heart of Asia, in the true sense of the term. The complex patchwork of transnational threats, challenges and opportunities facing the Central Asian region is today having a direct impact on the situation in Afghanistan and on the prospects for long-term civilization and development. I would like to address three main aspects.

First of all, I note the threats to security from terrorists and violent extremist groups operating in Afghanistan. In the framework of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission, Italy continues to stand side by side with our Afghan partners in order to enhance the capabilities of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. At the same time, in our view, there is a need for a broader strategy that adequately addresses the complex and transnational nature of the terrorist phenomenon. A constructive role for all regional neighbours and stakeholders is therefore essential in countering the threat of terrorism and violent extremism, including by denying such groups any form of safe haven. The next meeting of the Kabul Process, which we fully support, can provide the necessary political momentum to those common efforts, which must be accompanied by renewed commitment to making progress on an Afghan-led and -owned peace and reconciliation process.

Secondly, the threat of terrorism and its sources of financing is also very closely linked to the issue of drug trafficking. We are very concerned about the

latest developments reflected in the recently published report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) entitled *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017*, which notes a very large increase in opium cultivation. Italy supports various initiatives in that regard, such as the UNODC regional programme for Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. We are also engaged in successful triangular cooperation in order to enhance the capabilities of Afghan police officers in the area of counter-narcotics.

Thirdly, on regional integration and economic development, we strongly support the National Unity Government's vision for Afghanistan as a crossroads for trade and infrastructure in Central Asia. Interconnectivity is key to achieving sustained growth and development in Afghanistan and in the region. Italy is therefore proud of its long-term commitment to making that vision a reality — including by channelling a great part of its long-standing civilian assistance to Afghanistan to the financing of strategic transport and communication infrastructure projects, in particular in the western region of the country.

Regional mechanisms and organizations can play a crucial role in all of those areas and provide a platform to develop regional capacities and build mutual confidence. In that regard, we commend and support the role and initiatives of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia.

I would like to conclude by reiterating the need for a comprehensive approach to the stabilization and prosperity of the region by linking security and development.

The meeting rose at 2.05 p.m.